AMERICAN CERAMICS 4/1

RUDOLF STAFFEL

APRIL 6 — MAY 4, 1985

1

2.

3.

1. "LIGHT GATHERER," c. 1979
TRANSLUCENT PORCELAIN
HANDBUILT
5" x 10¾" DIAMETER

2. "LIGHT GATHERER," 1985
TRANSLUCENT PORCELAIN
HANDBUILT
5½" H. x 6½" x 6"

3. "LIGHT GATHERER," c. 1982
TRANSLUCENT PORCELAIN
WITH GLASS WHEELTHROWN
7¼" H. x 5" DIAMETER

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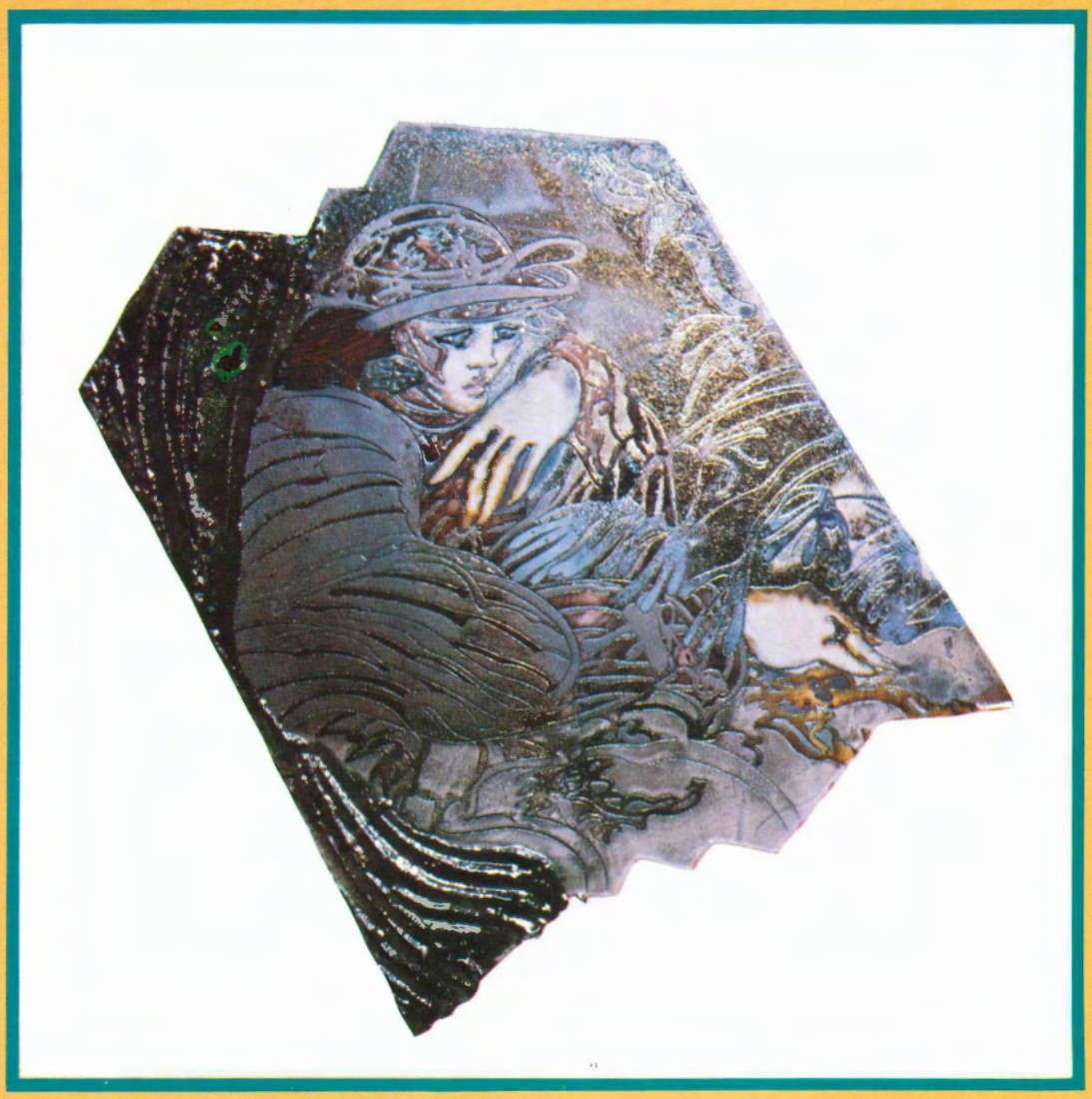
Sculpture

June
Glass Exhibition
Jay Musler
Flo Perkins
Amy Roberts
& other Glass Artists

July
James Morris
Ceramic Sculpture
Diane Olivier
Charcoal Drawings

Susan & Steven Kemenyffy

Recent Raku
July 14 - August 2



Outwitting Winter,
24″ x 26″, raku wall form.

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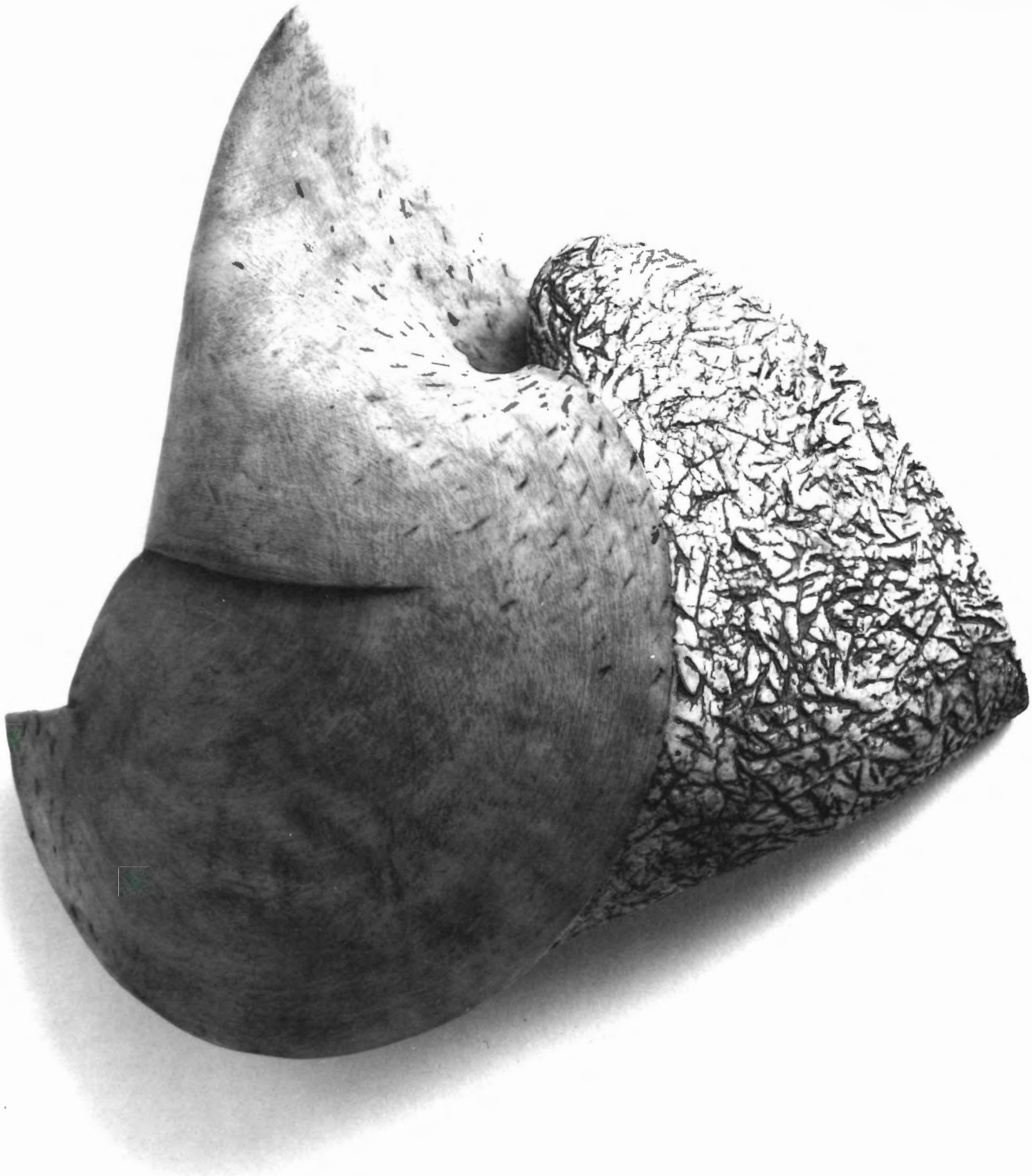
4-8-8 AKASAKA, MINATOKU, TOKYO JAPAN



Splits Around, 1984
Arlene Shechet,
25"x27"x10"
Photo: Pelka/Noble

Maria Friedrich

By appointment only 718 438 3040

Christina Bertoni
Mary Jo Bole
Dennis Gallagher
Arthur González
Jan Holcomb
Michael Lucero
Judy Moonelis
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Arlene Shechet
Nancy Smith
Peter Vandenberge
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(Cover): Not to worry, by the father held safe. ...The calendar says it's spring. We've had a couple rains. There is still snow against the woods and where it's drifted deep along the fence rows—and in the creek where the water hasn't washed it away. The ground is wet—too wet for the farmers to work in the fields. *By Jack Earl (1984), 28⅜" (71 cm) high, ceramic with oil paint. Courtesy Perimeter Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Jon Bolton.*

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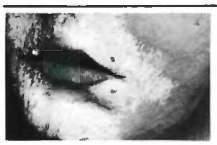

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Jack EARL

New Work

Exhibition
April 25–May 29

Theo Portnoy Gallery
162 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019
212 757 0461

New Book

The Genesis and Triumphant Survival of an Ohio Artist, by Lee Nordness

Author of *Art:USA:Now* and *Objects:USA:Now*

52 color plates, 59 black & white illustrations, approximately 350 pages.
Published by Perimeter Press Ltd., 4041 North Main Street, Racine, WI 53401. 414 631 4121.
Prepublication price $25 ppd. until September 1. After September 1, price $35 ppd.

"Dos-a-dos", 1984
Ceramic with Oil · 28 x 21 x 21"

Front:
"Not to worry, by the father held safe...

Back:
"The calendar says it's spring. We've had a couple rains. There is still snow against the woods and where it's drifted deep along the fence rows and in the creeks where the water hasn't washed it away. The ground is wet and dark. Too wet for the farmers to work in the fields."
Jack Earl, 1984, U.S.A.

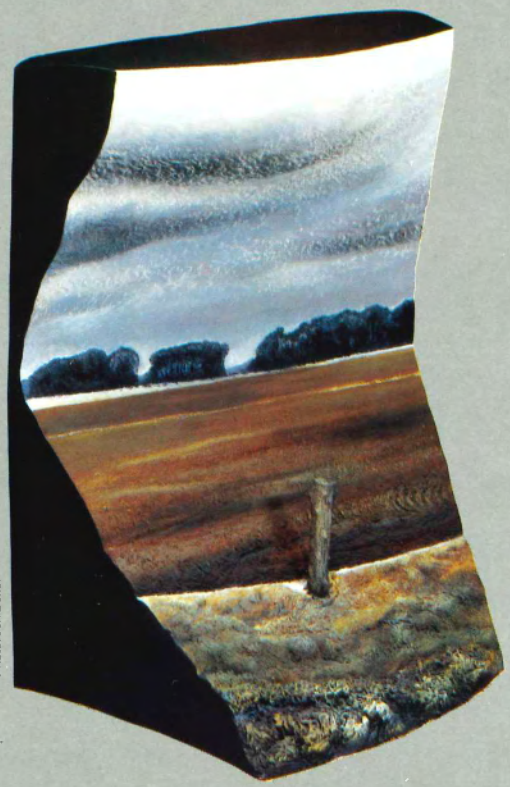

Photo: Jon Bolton

Jack EARL

Perimeter Press Ltd. is pleased to announce the publication of "Jack Earl—The Genesis and Triumphant Survival of an Underground Ohio Artist", by Lee Nordness.

Author of ART:USA:NOW and OBJECTS:USA:NOW

Publication date: September 1, 1985. Pre-publication Price: $25.00. After Sept. 1, 1985: $35.00.

Exhibition: June 7—July 18, 1985

356 West Huron Street
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International Art Expo
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Perimeter Gallery

Objects

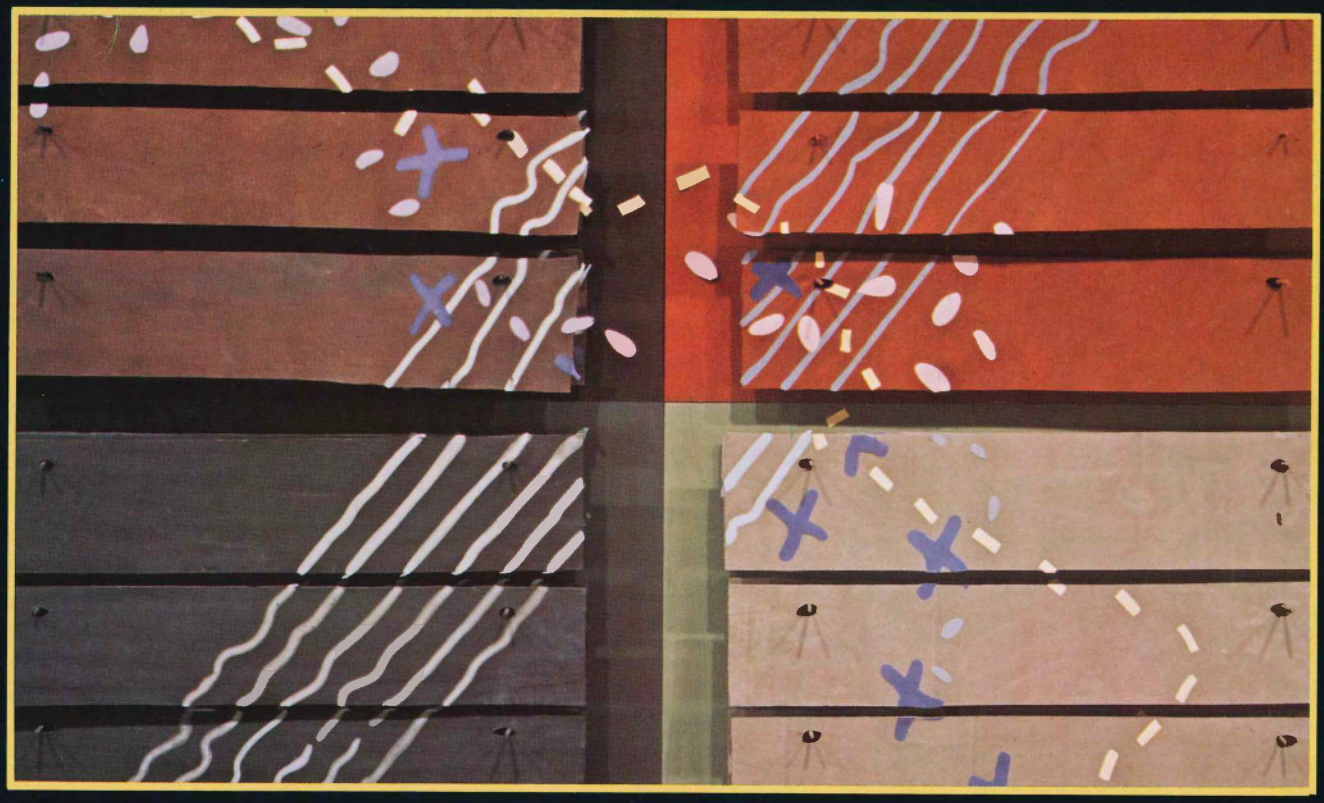
Objects Gallery
341 West Superior
Chicago, Illinois 60610
(312) 664-6622

Arnold Zimmerman
Sculpture, (1985), 102″ high, stoneware.

April 26–May 25

John Donoghue
Richard Hirsch
Michael Gross
Chris Gustin
Jane Gustin
Kirk Mangus
Robert Shay
Neil Tetkowski
Arnold Zimmerman

DINTENFASS



Artists Representing Environmental Arts, Inc. (A.R.E.A.) in collaboration with the Port of Authority of N.Y. and N.J., is pleased to announce the exhibition of a large ceramic wall relief by MARYLYN DINTENFASS. The work will be on view at the North Wing of the 42nd Street Bus Terminal from May 6 through August 16, 1985. "IMPRINT FRESCO", 16 ft. H. by 24 ft. L., is made up of six 7 ft. by 8 ft. panels. It is sited on the four story high wall of the north concourse. The brightly colored painterly images are a narrative saga of symbols that float through a changing color field. Artists Representing Environmental Arts is a not for profit, non-membership organization that exhibits art works in public spaces. For further information, Dorothea M. Silverman, A.R.E.A. Director, 212-288-7650.

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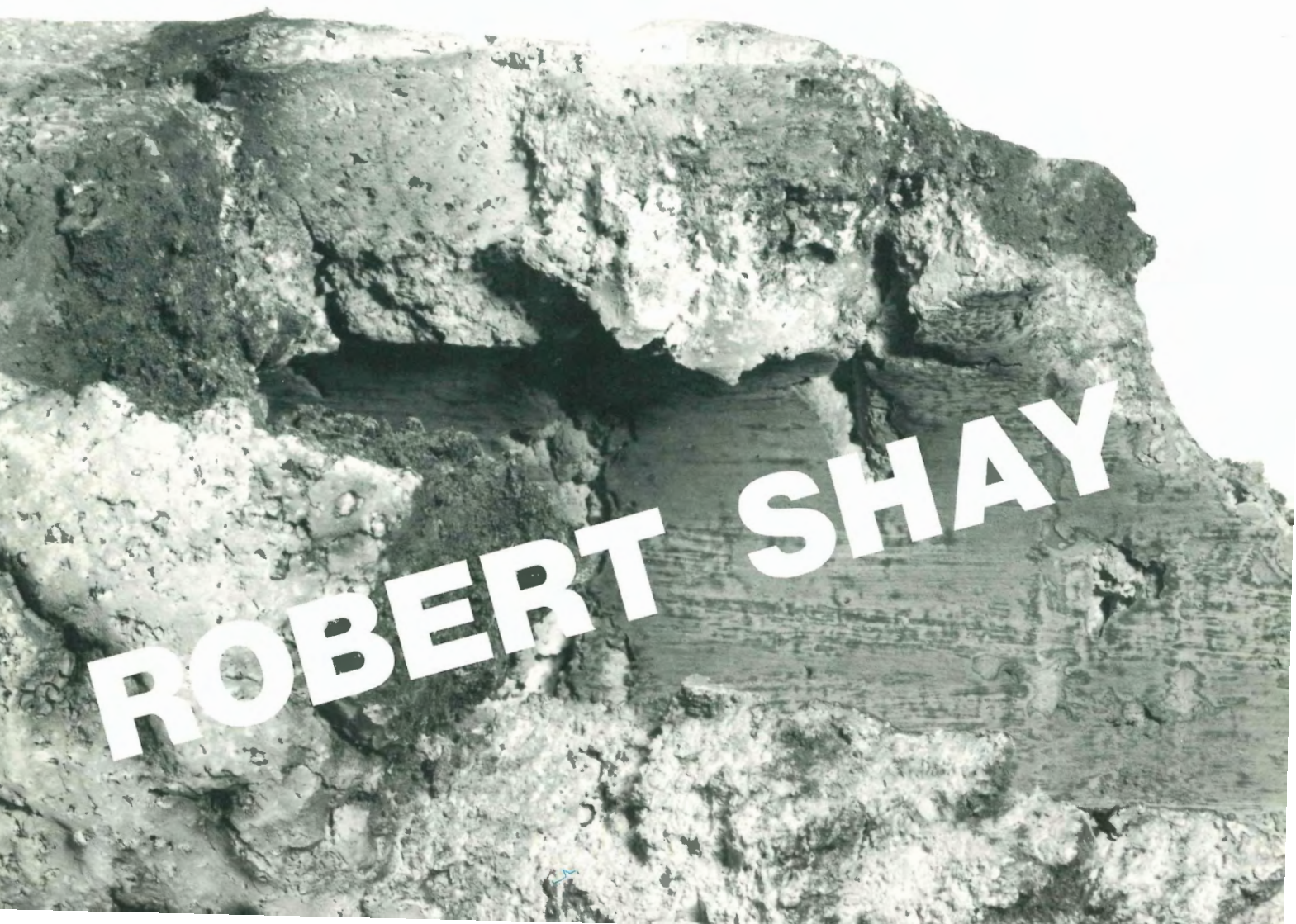

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DICK EVANS

Porcelain Vase Form (1984), 19″ high. Photo: Dedra M. Walls

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May 9–13, 1985

Michael H. Lord Gallery
700 North Milwaukee Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
414/272/1007

RUDY AUTIO

Recent Work
May 2-June 1, 1985

Rudy Autio
"Dog on the Beach" 1985
stoneware, glazes
hand built: 33½" x 23" x 23"
photo: Doug Grumm
© 1984 American Craft Council

RONNA NEUENSCHWANDER

Saharan Shards II
June 6-29, 1985

Ronna Neuenschwander
"The Last Voyage" 1985
earthenware, adobe
12"h x 36"w x 5"d

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(617) 771-4499

Ten Arrow Gallery Shop
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Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
(617) 876-1117

Sylvia Ullman American Crafts Gallery
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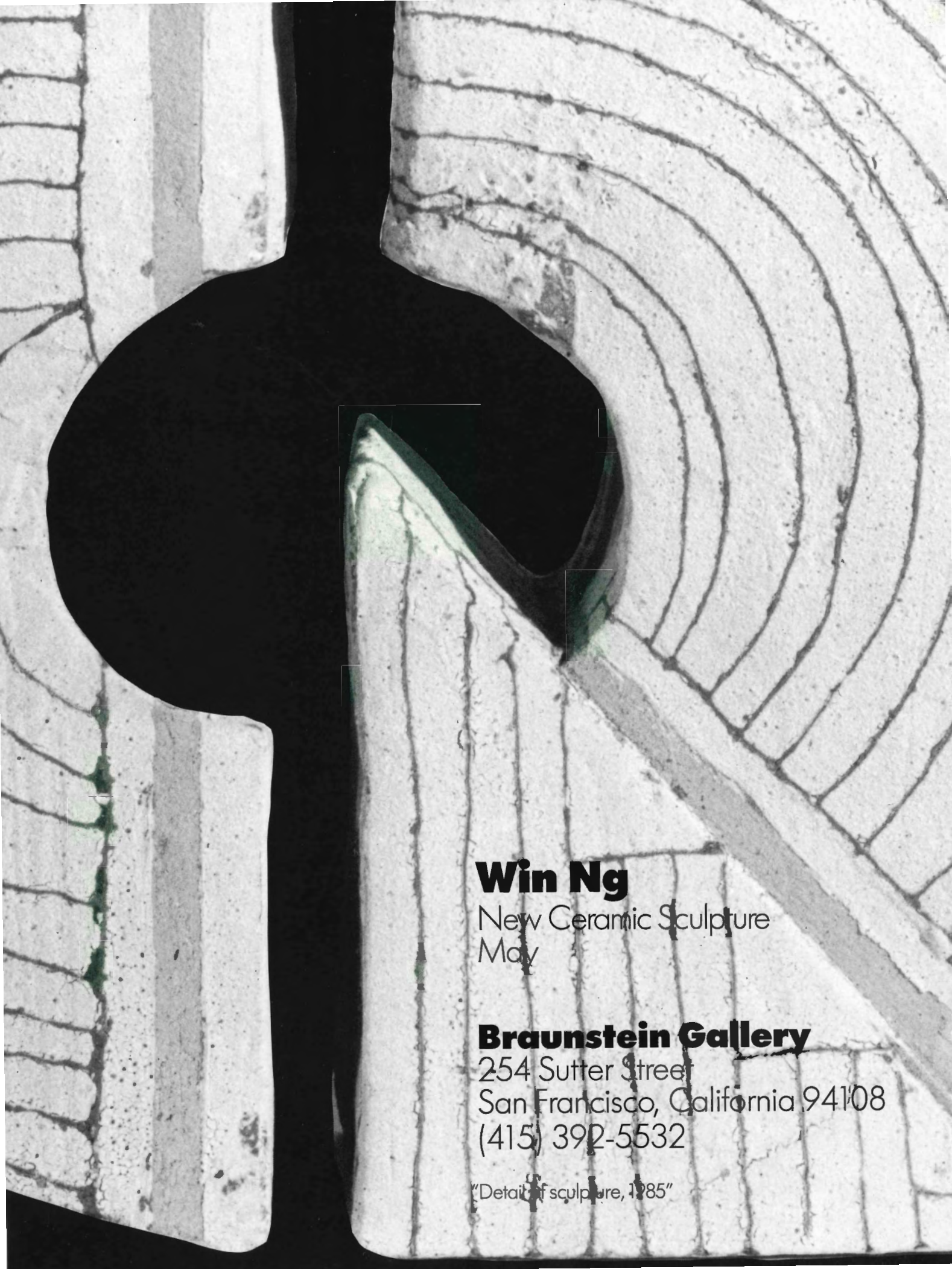
Cleveland, Ohio 44120
(216) 231-2008



Win Ng
New Ceramic Sculpture
May

Braunstein Gallery
254 Sutter Street
San Francisco, California 94108
(415) 392-5532

"Detail of sculpture, 1985"

I Met Marsha *(1969–70), 40½" x 34" x 5½" (103 x 86 x 14 cm), porcelain with wood frame. Collection Gerri and Tom Kerrigan. Photo: Richard Byrd.*

Jack Earl
The Genesis and Triumphant Survival of an Underground Ohio Artist

Lee Nordness

This profile is drawn from a forthcoming book by Lee Nordness, Jack Earl: The Genesis and Triumphant Survival of an Underground Ohio Artist *relating the story of Jack Earl and evaluating his career. It is written in a series of shifting scenes—including tape interviews, stories written by Earl, songs, letters, and of course descriptions and commentaries by the author. A selection of these scenes follows.*

On an all but empty county highway, Jack drove us leisurely northward, away from Indian Lake where he, his wife Fairlie, and two of their three children live. Windows frame mile after mile of the same two fields: horizon to road shoulder, the same interleafed rows of corn or bushy lanes of soybeans, leaves on both plants motionless, limp. A county marker swept across the eye.

Fairlie: See that! Hardin County in Ohio. Believe it or not, we are now driving over what everyone says, even books, is the most incredible marsh in the United States. We live on the edge of it, and Roy, my dad, has his farm right on it.

Ponderous ice from the last glacial invasion excavated a vast, ham-shaped depression, which the thaw deliberately transformed into a lake. Further warming germinated untended plant life: the water's surface was soon choked into a classic dense vegetative marsh. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, settlers avoided the crepitating, unsure footing of this primeval heirloom, but when arable land grew less accessible, the marsh's value was reassessed: here lay from two to ten feet of the accumulations of eons that supported a luxuriant growth. Why couldn't this trophic soil support luxuriant crops instead? However, decades elapsed before the paludal storehouse could be effectively drained, and some say it still hasn't been tamed. Along the way, the black, granular marsh soil was dubbed "muck."
Elk and deer considered the basin home; bear, porcupines, wild hogs with foot-long tusks, scavenging gray wolves, and scavenging black wolves discouraged intruders; also uninviting were copperheads, racers, and prairie rattlesnakes coiled in tall grasses and nesting in springs; mud eels, gar pike, blunt-nosed minnows, yellow perch, and both rock and black bass crowded pools and waterways.
The most visible residents were annual summer tenants—pigeons. Well over a million visited the marsh as soon as boughs budded, and lingered until leaves yellowed, each year roosting on the same weeping willows of a forty-acre island in the center of the morass. Daily the birds would lift in unison, establish a flight altitude, then arc into the dawn to raid off-marsh farms, stripping fields of from four thousand to five thousand bushels of grain in a single day. Finally in the 1870s, farmers delivered a challenge: on moonless sorties oars were silently drawn through uncertain waters to the island, where shotguns rose from boats to blast the predators into hell. The pigeons' ranks were thinned, but they returned on schedule. Or, until 1883, the languid summer when farm families stared in disbelief at pigeonless skies, when children remained awake as late as possible and awoke as early as possible, ever alert for wingflaps. Praise the Lord: the pigeons had verily forsaken the marsh. Those who chanced to witness a million pigeons glide aloft as one form passed the image to children to pass to children.
In 1956, Jack was graduated from nearby Bluffton College, and during the summer accepted a faculty position to teach art and English at a high school in the next town. The privacy of his marriage to Fairlie Hanson during the summer would now commence, away from college and family, experiencing the challenge of a twoself-sufficiency. Fairlie as housewife and mother and lover. Jack as school teacher and father and lover.

Jack: No, not as artist. It would never have entered my head to call myself an artist.

When twenty-nine, Jack asked the family to gamble its safety: his artistic worth must be tested by the rigors of graduate school, even though it entailed forfeiting the high school teaching post—two years of no income. Jack lept, a crucial leap, forsaking one level of security at the risk of not attaining another more profound level, the leap common to those taunted by an unmined worth. The muscle of belief in his gift was evident: twice he refused to accept the

Jack Earl (center) with his wife Fairlie and father-in-law Roy Hanson in Uniopolis, Ohio. Jack lived in the center house during his childhood. Photo: Lee Nordness.

Love in the Arbor *(1975), 7¼" (18 cm) high, porcelain. Collection Karen Johnson Boyd. Photo: Jon Bolton.*

Boy with Kiss (Ohio Boy) *(1977), 16" (40 cm) high, cast porcelain with china paint and glaze. Collection Mr. and Mrs. James F. Keane. Photo: Bruce Rosenblum.*

Carrot Finger *(1981), 27" (69 cm) high, ceramic and oil paint. Collection Karen Johnson Boyd. Photo: Jon Bolton.*

I knew a boy who had a carrot for a finger. I guess he was born with it 'cause he had it when I met him in high school when we was boys. It was just a carrot stickin' out where a finger ought to have been. When I first noticed it I looked out of the corner of my eye at it a few times and got used to it and didn't pay it any attention. Nobody else did either, they were all used to it. Sometimes some younger kid would holler "Carrot Finger" at him from a distance but he didn't pay any attention to them kids. When he got older and went to church, a wedding, or a funeral, he would keep his carrot finger in a picket so he wouldn't distract from the service. He got married to a local girl here, a real nice girl but not as pretty a one as he could have got, I suppose, if he hadn't had a carrot finger. They had three kids and they all came out normal. Anyhow, one time he was walkin' in the woods. It was in December, one of those special days in December when the sun is real warm, and little white puffy clouds was passin' shadows over you once in a while. He had plenty of cloths on since it was December. It was nice and warm and he layed down in the tall grass on the side of a hill and was watchin' the clouds drift by and listenin' to the bees buzz. You know how nice it is to hear bees on a real warm winter day. Well he was layin' there and he went to sleep but what he didn't know was that there was a lot of rabbits in that woods. When he woke up, his finger, the carrot one, was gone. He told me he thought it might grow back out, but it didn't.

disdainful evaluations of professors at two colleges. Ironically, his third try was at the most respected ceramics department in the state, Ohio State University, where he was admitted, earning a Masters degree in Fine Arts in two years. Soon after, a position was located instructing amateur potters at the Toledo Museum School of Art. Simultaneously, he struggled to find a suitable medium for his clay statement, and after abandoning first stoneware, then plaster, he embraced the most challenging of all clay bodies, porcelain.

From Toledo Museum reference books, Jack selected two containers, one a bulging round jar with a round cover, the other a vase. Each had been initially created by a European master, but obviously under the influence of Chinese masters. Because Jack did not possess the technique to wheelthrow porcelain ("like turning a jelly fish into a bowl") he laboriously constructed his forms by coiling, inching upward until the desired height was attained. Next he modeled two faces, a girl's and a dog's, to grasp on either side for lifting. Lines were traced along the shoulders of the pot in graceful crossing patterns, with minute bas-relief daisies where lines intersected. Modeled flowers were on the cover as finger grips. The undulating shape of this lidded bowl was a taxing challenge to recreate with coiling, particularly as a first exercise in porcelain.

Jack chose an intrepid move: the Everson Museum of Art held the most esteemed national juried exhibitions for ceramics, and the next was such a short time off (Jack was far too anxious to wait two years for the following one) that the two porcelains to be submitted would be the first two he would ever create. If neither survived the firing—a likely possibility—Jack would renege on the application; the entry deadline allowed no time for refiring duplicates. In fact, the timing was so tight, he had already constructed padded shipping boxes.

Jack earnestly wanted a fresh green celadon tint for his containers, but lacked the knowledge to incorporate it into the clay. One of his amateur class members raised a hand and described an effective mock celadon: a green surface produced by placing half of one percent of iron oxide into the glaze instead of the clay.

The vessels emerged from the fire—2408 degrees F—exactly as Jack had envisioned, and were carefully laid to rest on the yielding foam of his hand-constructed crate. Notification of acceptance or rejection would be mailed by the Everson Museum within a month following the jurying. The exhibition itself would open November 24, 1968.

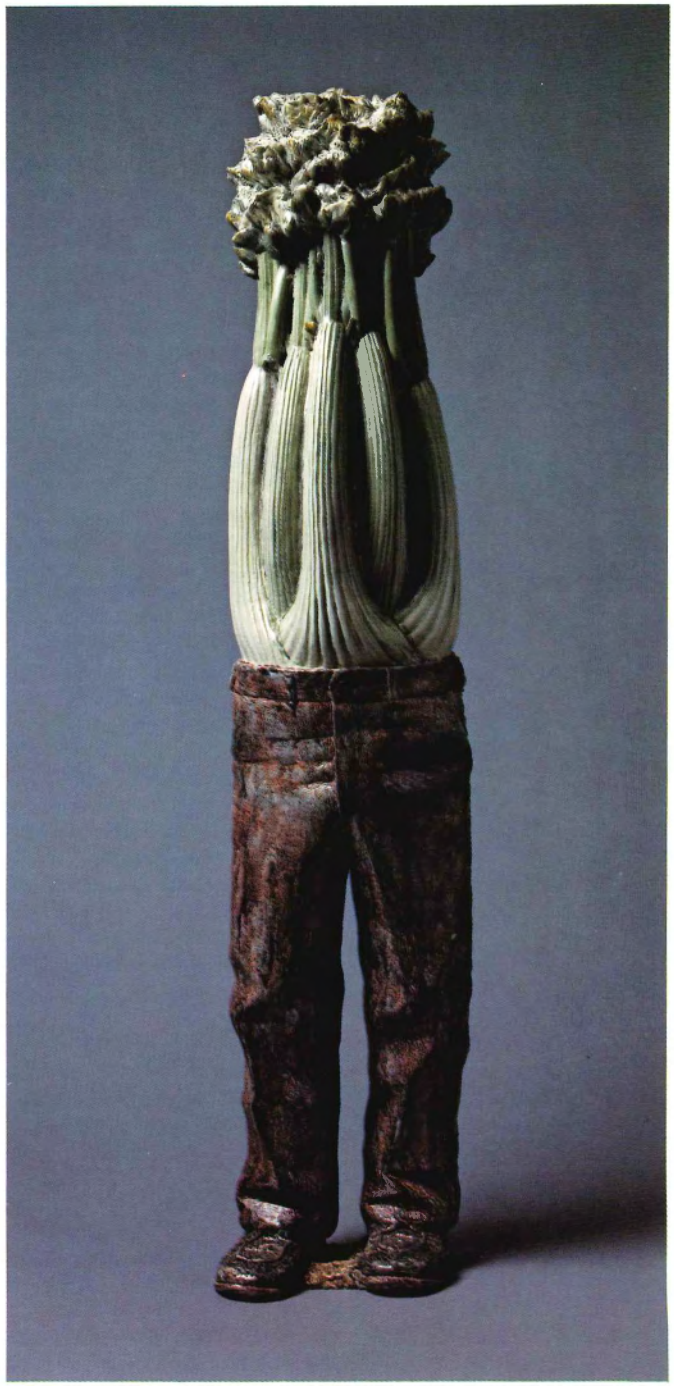
Some five weeks later, as scheduled, word arrived from the museum. Both of Jack's containers were accepted for the exhibition. Later another letter: the *Lidded Jar* had won the Award of Distinction.

A further communication: *Lidded Jar* would be acquired by the museum for its permanent collection. The final communication: an invitation for the opening in Syracuse. Fairlie's budget, however, had not anticipated the expense of a roundtrip flight, the only form of transportation that would guarantee his honoring the tight Toledo teaching schedule. Jack and Fairlie spent the night of the opening in Genoa.

Jack: When I was in college and then teaching high school I used to read a lot. I even taught Creative Writing.
A Friend: Did you ever read Dostoevsky?
Jack: What did he write?
A Friend: Novels.
Jack:....In English?

(For some time, I had been anxious to meet Roy, Fairlie's father, a preacher-at-large, particularly when Jack pronounced him to be the most Christ-like person he knew. One day, unexpectedly, Jack and Fairlie took me to his farm on the marsh, but on the way mentioned that Roy was away on a visit.)

Back some fifty yards from the road stood a two-storied, white A-frame house of modest proportions, four rooms downstairs, two up. The lawn had long disappeared under heavy weeds and wild brush. What appeared to be fruit trees leaned in unpruned states, unruly branches poking radially and asymmetrically, some into the ground, some onto the porch. Dirty windows. Siding paint badly weathered. The entry drive lay to the left, a rutted road that stopped when on a line with the rear of the house. Nearby, a couple of trucks rested fender-high in brambles. A small shed, perhaps once a summer kitchen, slumped at the rear. The steps were crumbling at the kitchen



The Celery Man *(1979), 28" (71 cm) high, ceramic with china paint. Collection Daniel Jacobs, New York. Photo: Bernard Handzel.*

entrance, the screen door torn, the door without lock. The kitchen: no floor covering, soiled walls, paper on TV, aluminum plates on the floor, on the table, on the drainboard, on the stove—everywhere—each holding a portion of a dried, unfinished meal. Furnishings comprised a refrigerator, sink, enormous coal stove, large stained wing-backed chair, and floor lamp with a ribboned shade.

Jack: This is the way Roy likes it. He lives here in the kitchen. Sleeps in the chair usually.

Paul Smith, director of the American Craft Museum, offered to mount a show of Jack's work in 1971. It was Jack's first one-man museum exhibition and first New York exhibition.
I was unable to see the exhibition until a month after its opening. The small top-floor gallery had been painted entirely white, including sculpture stands. In addition to spotlights, shadowless available light poured in from floor-to-ceiling north windows, and in this space devoid of distraction, the white porcelain containers dazzled, each as chaste as the first porcelain container ever formed: elegant coffeepots, vases, and jars predominated. The surface flourishes of flower garlands and nudes and birds and leaves and bananas and strawberries and more leaves and napkins and puppies enlivened both the forms and viewers. Seventeen works. I had arrived at the museum door when it opened, early enough to be alone in the top-floor gallery for half an hour. On the way downstairs, I glanced into a small mezzanine gallery and remained transfixed by a life-sized sculpture of a large dog of a certain age, as blasé as the most jaded of the jet set, seated with hind paws in pink dancing slippers, eyelids half-closed, a red bow for a collar, a red panting tongue, a tail bent under his bottom to protrude suggestively between his legs in front, a ruff of wiry rufescent hair down his spine. Unmistakably porcelain, a dazzling achievement in conception, modeling, and scale.
A museum guard whom I knew stopped at the doorway to ask if I had noticed the plaque on the wall. "It's the title—all of that's the title!" Its presence was as unexpected as the dog's: a flat porcelain plaque, almost egg-shaped, perhaps more almond. Tiny porcelain clam shells traced the outer edge, not unlike a necklace. Eggs and clams and almonds—containers of secrets. With further reflection the shape became the ruralization of a *vesica piscis*—a mandorla, an aureole masquerading in drugstore iconography. The message on the plaque was written in gold—good grief, it was in Jack Earl's hand. Was Jack sophisticated enough to employ these numinous forms? Clams, eggs, almonds, *vesica piscis*/aureole certify this story to be more than a title—it is Jack Earl scripture. Smith had rightly not collocated the dog with the other sculpture: the frolicsome statements upstairs were of another turn of the road.
Following several visits to the museum, I unraveled, for my satisfaction, the personal declaration—if not credo—Jack fired into this redoubtable dog-and-title, the final sculpture created for the New York exhibition.
The surface announcement: with the uninhibited tour-de-force of the dog, Jack first proclaims—almost trumpets—his technical assurance, and second, acknowledges himself as fine artist. The technical self-confidence evolved through his adoption of porcelain, permitting him to build shapes and design surfaces not inhibiting his visions; the artistic self-assurance solidified through the approval of his conceptual ability by peers, starting with the Everson jury and ending with Smith's inviting him for a New York museum exhibition.
The deeper—inside the clam/egg/almond—kernel disclosure: no more hitchhiking on bandwagons of stylish movements. From this point his work would be oriented only toward personal experience—which meant life in Ohio, precisely as the gilded narrative title for the dog exemplified. The *vesica piscis*, consciously or not, signifies the anagoge of the decision, uniting him with the muck-world goodness of heart and deed, his own swamp of creativity. Finally, selecting a dog for his metaphor—and particularly this dog—is assurance Jack's credenda will not preclude humor.
A trepidatious journey would pass heavily before Jack, sequestered in a Midwest aboveground underground, frustrated that no one could "explain art"; he would discover what initially could never have been conceivable: the meaning and reality of art (nonverbal entities) are reflections of the meaning and reality of himself (nonverbal states). A flow waits to be recognized, respected (germane to spiritual energy), which circulates knowledge from and of the self capable of arousing the creation of responsive representations of the self, that is, unique communicable forms. Employable mediums for this flow? Word processor. Pen and drawing pad. Musical notes with/without flags. Gold, also iron. Porcelain, also hobby clay. Even mud has sufficed.
Jack held the position of assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond) for several years, the only period the Earls ever lived outside Ohio; and the experience proved demoralizing. Major frustrations centered in the university.

Lee: What kind of lies were you told?
Jack: Well, one example was while I was there they were going to move the department to a better building where you would have better facilities, twice the space. Of course that never happened.
Lee: Was that an out-and-out falsehood, or was there a change from a higher level at the last minute?
Jack: It's somehow or other higher up where it begins as a thought and then somewhere or other it gets changed into fact, and by the time it gets down to the teacher—well, you know you live around these kind of things. They become a reality to you—and then they don't happen....Now let me give you one illustration of what they would do: on a Wednesday they had to know by Friday where we wanted the light sockets in the new space. They wanted them all marked on the plan of this building.
Lee: They aren't going to make floor plans for a building just to keep the faculty busy.
Jack: Well, like you say, you know, it wasn't necessarily a lie, but—yes, it was a lie to me because when someone tells you a thing is going to happen, and it doesn't...and no reason is given.
Lee: You're describing the reality of any bureaucratic world.
Jack: That's right—which to me is lying.
Lee: But knowing it was merely talk didn't help, did it?
Jack: I learned how to handle it, but it still gave me headaches. If you like to talk and talk and talk and talk, a university department can be worthwhile. If you want to think about it ten hours a day and give it your life. I didn't and don't have that kind of energy. On the surface I was lied to by students, teachers, department heads, and deans. It hurt my pride.

During my first visit to the Earls in Ohio in 1979, I was surprised to find Jack's studio only an eight-foot-wide shelf in the garage, with walls of filthy, heavy-duty plastic sheets stapled to the rafters.

Lee: But where do you stretch out the clay? Where's the kiln? Where...
Jack: I don't work like that anymore....It'll be easier to show you. You have to see my other place. I'll get Fairlie. It's just a few minutes away.

Jack drove us to a nearby lakeside resort crammed with rundown summer cottages, and parked in front of the Chippewa Trophy and Ceramics Shop. Inside, tall shelves were crowded with greenware, unfired molded objects waiting for inspired china-paint decoration from amateurs—and then a kiln to end it all.

Jack: Oh, they fire right here. There's a kiln in the back section. Hobby ceramists can also buy clay here.

I turned into the stacks, certain Jack will next tell me he now works in hobby clay and has the young man behind the counter fire his works in an electric kiln.
Greenware to the right, to the left: cement gray molds of planters with deer intaglios, booted Turks with puffy onion-shaped hats kneeling in prayer, Santa Claus boots with holly, planters in the shapes of big frogs and snails, camels, biblical wise men, horses rearing at each other, bird houses, ducks, bears, little girls in pigtails, little boys and little girls holding cats, baby angels kissing, boy scouts at attention, witches on brooms, on pumpkins, on candlesticks,

shrouds, lions, poodles, King Arthur's castles, chess sets of medieval figures, lounging nude women with crotches concealed and breasts revealed, cups, tall chalices, small animals, hearts with roses, girls with milk pails, spreadwinged eagles on rocks....Jack appeared and I followed him into the back room, where he immediately pointed to a white, decagon object about the size of a washing machine: Skutt Electric Kiln.

Jack: The oven can accommodate an object, oh, thirty inches high. And the diameter's about two feet.
Lee: You fire here?
Jack: No, I bring my piece in still green and they fire it. Then I take it home and glaze it. They fire it again. Then I take it home and china paint it. They fire it again. Three firings.
Lee: The body is porcelain, of course.
Jack: 'Nope.
Lee: You are going to say more on the subject?
Jack:....I use a clay I buy from the hobby shop here.
Lee: Yes?
Jack: The clay they use here to cast the figurines. Only, I don't cast it. I dry it out.
Lee: It's liquid then, a slip?
Jack: Yes.
Lee: Do you know of any serious artists who use a slip clay for modeling?
Jack: I don't know of anyone who uses the slip the way I use it.
Lee: It's good clay, though, not some half-clay, half-I-don't-know-what they push onto hobbyists?
Jack: Oh no, it's quality. It has to be or they couldn't cast these figurines. It just wouldn't work in the molds. They have to use good clay. In fact, the company tried to change the formula and so many people had trouble with it that they went back to the original recipe. It's called G. H. S.
Lee: Good Hobby Stuff?
Jack: Hey—that's close. Great Hobby Slip.
Lee: Now, how do you reduce the liquidity of slip so it can be worked?
Jack: I pour it out on a plaster slab. The plaster absorbs the water. I just wait. When enough has been absorbed and evaporated, when it has a thick mudlike consistency, that's it.
Lee: It sounds like white muck.
Jack: It works fine. It holds well. It builds well. It has a lot of strength. It sticks to itself good. It's a real nice clay body to work with.
Lee: From then on you use the same building techniques you did with porcelain?
Jack: Right. You know everything I make is first built with coils of clay. Then I model that. Well, modeling and every other technique I can think of to get the effect I need.
Lee: You use the glazes from here?
Jack: Yes, the transparent glaze. Then the china paint—you know they have that in every color here. And you know I like china paint because it comes out of the kiln the same color it was when you put it on the sculpture. With those other glazes you never know what can happen in the heat.

The following morning, I awoke ahead of the others and waited at the edge of the cement bulwark protecting the rounded lake point of their property. The tan water lay flat in early heat, and Turkey Foot Point, the peninsula to the left, was almost lost in haze. Jack's abandoning porcelain, probably the most elegant of all clay bodies, for Great Hobby Slip still disquieted me, and I had carried my distress into sleep. With a new morning I was troubled that I could ever have allowed his working with G.H.S. to unsettle me. For years in lectures and articles I had faulted the fine art establishment for media snobbery, insistence that objects in craft media must be confined to a less lofty plane. What difference could a choice of clay body hold in the evaluation of an aesthetically successful object? Jack joined me, and I admitted my media bigotry, and its stupidity.

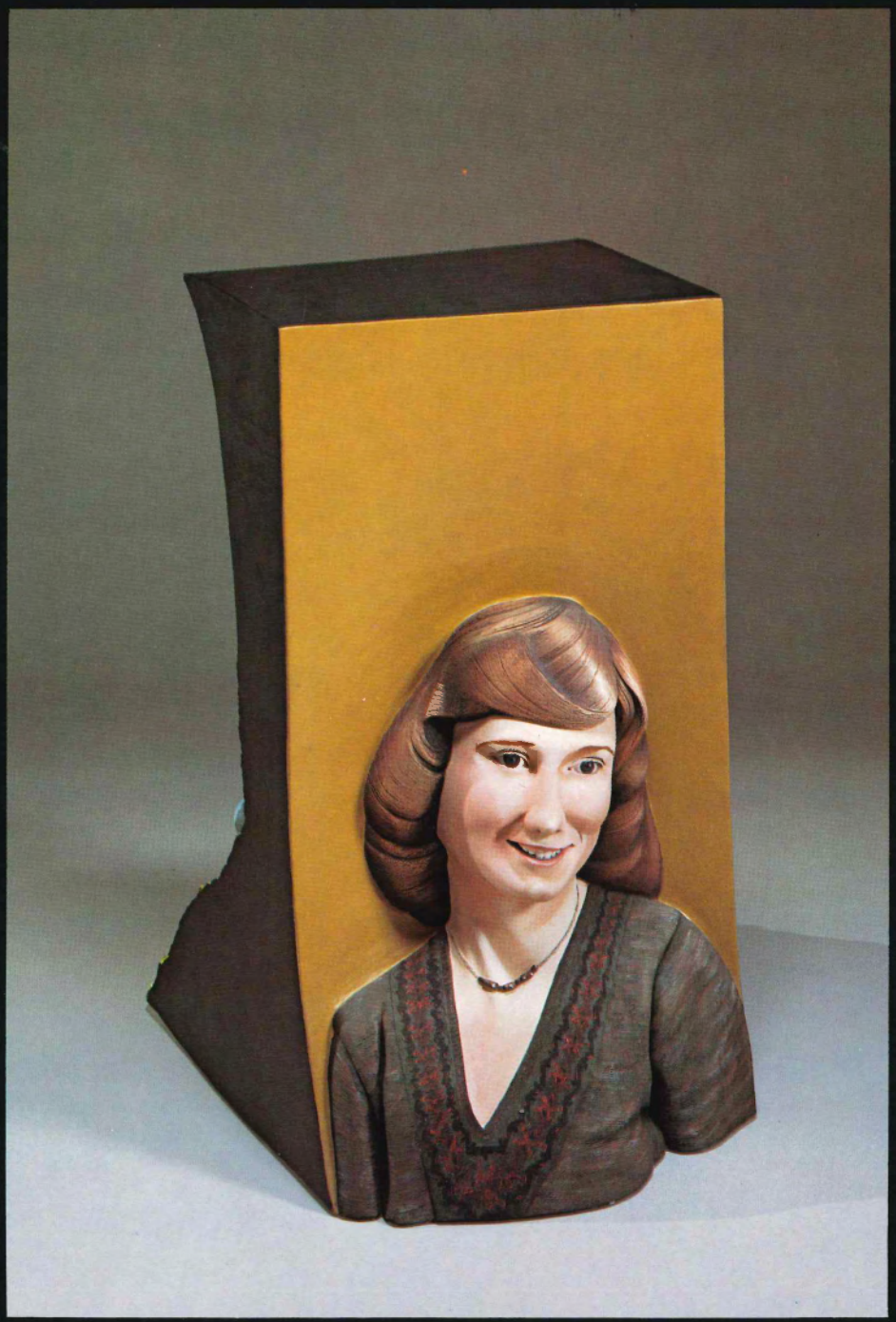
Lee: Have you told your gallery dealer you're not working in porcelain?
Jack: No, but I haven't told Theo Portnoy it was porcelain anymore either.
Lee: Tell her. I'm sure she thinks it is, and she may be innocently telling collectors it is. She won't mind....Just don't tell her right away it's called Great Hobby Slip.

For five or six years after returning to Ohio from Virginia, Jack worked exclusively with obvious marshland iconography: muck farmers, hound dogs, farm houses, Roy (scores of Roy)—all genre scenes gently poking fun at those he loved most. Then at the end of the seventies, he precipitously turned to more sophisticated and metaphorical and elusive forms to express his own maturing perspective and values.

Behind the Door There Is a Place to Walk, Explore, Rest, Discover and Dream (1984)

A desolate mountainside rises slowly, then tilts sharply to a great height. At the rear of the gradually rising foreground is a simple, perhaps abandoned, frame house—or more likely a mill: a peaked roof at the second floor, weathered wooden sidings, roof shingles missing. The side facing to the right is shored up with a high rock wall, as it borders a sandy river bed, which widens as it runs to the foreground and off the sculpture. Two or three trees stand across the ravine from the building, but the rocky promontory behind is arid. Repeatedly we survey the surface, searching for the significance of this subject.
Finally we move around the sculpture. The flat ceramic sides angle sharply toward each other as they move to the rear, unendurably narrowing the width of the back panel. With black paint blanking out the sides, the river image actually appears to be thrust at us by a zoom lens: a wall filled by a closed screen door (real screening is affixed) with a partly opened door behind. Ceramic cinematography —from the wide-angle mountainside view on the other side to this closeup.
The deep interior is blacked out, but between the inner door and the screen door stands a beautiful young boy—no older than two or three, dressed in the smock children wore some fifty or sixty years ago. He presses against the (evidently locked) screen door with hands and forehead, his eyes, fixed on the outside world, reflecting one compulsion: escape. The sculpture, open to any number of questions and interpretations, is gripping. Why is a boy this young suffocating? The drive to push through the screen is stronger than wanting to go out and play. Is the drive to escape from—or to?
This sculpture is the third or fourth work Jack constructed with a definite front and back, wherein neither side seems to relate to the other. For a descriptive word to identify this form, I suggest dos-a-dos, a French expression well known to square dancers (who pronounce it "dosey-dough") that means, of course, back-to-back. Whatever the motivations of the drama, this dos-a-dos sculpture stands masterful, technically and psychologically. The mating of the diminutive building in the massive mountainscape with the enlarged screen door throws our visual circuitry out for a moment. Then on encountering the child, the circuitry shorts again. To think that there is no sign that this work is a dos-a-dos—or is there? Does the very incompleteness of it—that is, no seeming message in the landscape—arouse sufficient curiosity to force the viewer to the back? Such audacity! The title, *Behind the Door There Is a Place,* is as enigmatic as the dos-a-dos relationship of the mountain and the boy. The work is fraught with unresolved emotional conflict. The mountain was borrowed from a reproduction of a Ralph Blakelock

(On the following two pages): You are ten thousand, the center of a flower, words of peace, a tree planted....And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols; and the "Spirit of God came upon Zachariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, thus saith God, why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye can not prosper? Because thy have forsaken the Lord, He hath also forsaken you." *(1984), 27¼" (68 cm) high, ceramic with oil paint. Courtesy Perimeter Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Jon Bolton.*



painting, the boy borrowed from a "found photograph." Jack confirms he sensed a strong relationship between the images, but could not verbalize it. "That's why I make sculptures."
From dozens of yellowed, bent photographs in a junk-shop box, Jack may be inexplicably drawn to purchase two or three images. These are placed in a drawer at home. Later—weeks, months—another old photo trove is fingered through with the anticipation that a snapshot will fire the memory of an image in his private cache. If it happens, it is acquired. Later he places them side-by-side to confirm a symbiosis. If satisfied of an inter- (inner) relationship, he builds the structure to support their arcana. Finally, a title is assigned suggesting his reading of the energy, aware that what has been created is polysemic, contented that other viewers will deduce unlike but equally satisfying denouements.
Jack no longer questions if his sculptures are art, secure that none of the vertiginous evaluations can be finite. As he juxtaposes photographs, models their shapes, and names the result, he is not disquieted that none of his motivations during any stage of the creation can be fully understood, and certainly not identified through words. We remember Dégas: "Only when he no longer knows what he is doing does the painter produce valuable work."
David Freed, a painter and printmaker, taught with Jack at both Toledo and Virginia Commonwealth.

David: I never knew him to be a bit intellectual. He could not discuss literature or music, in fact, any concept. Nor could he teach it, which disturbed some students. It's not easy to know Jack. He's hardly what one would label an outgoing fellow. And he lived far away from the Virginia Commonwealth University, so we didn't see too much of him socially. But I like Jack. He's just different from most people, and one should not presume he is sizing up matters the way the rest of us are.

Lee: Jack, you have always said Roy was the most Christ-like person you ever knew. I sure like him, but...
Jack: Well, one trait that Roy has in relation to people is, well...when you say he is a nice man, well, he has lived with folks who are trash, with bums, and he has put up with incredible things from these people, but still remained friends with them. He just simply doesn't get upset with people.
Lee: Well, yes, his giving spiritually and materially to others. And yet, so strange, letting his physical world, the family house he inherited, deteriorate around him. Isn't its collapse imminent?
Jack: But that only affects Roy. He lives alone and really that's nobody's business but his own....

Once Jack mentioned what he liked most about my mid-seventies article for *Art in Virginia* magazine: the comparison of his borrowing sculptural forms with Shakespeare's lifting dramatic plots. I suspect my statement had legitimized an action which Jack may have felt critics could consider thievery.
Jack has stolen shapes from Iga masters, Voulkos, Autio, LaVerdiere, *Playboy* magazine, European and Oriental porcelain sculptors, Boucher, innumerable Italian painters, Blakelock, calendar artists, to name but a few sources—and now "found photographs."
Artists have interminably renewed, consciously and unconsciously, other artists' forms for personal visions. Jack responded to a porcelain vase in The Toledo Museum and stole it. He responded to nimble Boucher nudes, also seen at Toledo, and set them frolicking around and dangling from the vase. For his canvasses, Picasso cloned scores of primitive figures from the basements of the Louvre. Jack now recognizes that thievings for personal reinterpretations are widespread and traditionally legitimate.

On a later trip to Ohio, I finally met Roy. He and I rode in the back seat, Fairlie and Karen Boyd, Jack's Chicago art dealer, sat in front with Jack. We passed slowly through snow-heavy landscapes on the way to Uniopolis, where Jack spent his childhood, to take further photographs. I handed Roy the tape recorder, and he used his low-volume confidential tone for the microphone. I could catch only occasional phrases. On some fields where wind had lifted off the more recent snowfalls, sprouts of winter wheat were exposed, bright green blades prospering, hardening, poking through their thinned white layer of protection, testaments to survival.

Roy: (into recorder) Dogs are nice things to have. With the Chihuahua my mother left when she died, I had five dogs that I kep in the house. At one time I had the four pups plus the four big dogs, but the house got so high I decided I had to cut down on the dogs a little bit. Someone stole all of them but one, and he was a lovely dog, the one I had left and he protected me very much....

Roy's voice trailed away and silenced as his head turned to the window, the landscape seeming to claim him. Up front Fairlie was enthusiastically informing Karen, just as she had informed me on my first visit, that this was the highest area in the state and four rivers originated here, each flowing into a different corner of Ohio. Did Fairlie know about the river which flowed from Eden to irrigate Paradise? And that from Paradise the river divided into four to nourish the major areas of the old world? They are even designated on medieval world maps.

Lee Nordness, the author of OBJECTS:USA *and* ART:USA:NOW, *opened Lee Nordness Galleries in New York in 1958, specializing in later years in art objects in craft media. Nordness closed his gallery in 1974 to act as a consultant to museums, corporations, and collectors.* Jack Earl: The Genesis and Triumphant Survival of an Underground Ohio Artist, *will be published this spring by Perimete Press, Ltd., Racine, Wisconsin (350 pages, illustrated in color and black-and-white). Jack Earl is represented by Perimeter Gallery, Chicago, and Theo Portnoy Gallery, New York.*

The Flesh Pots of Rudy Autio

Edward Lebow

Rudy Autio has worked so steadily and away from the noise of both coasts that one tends to consider him an earnest tinkerer—a man whose earlier years were spent collecting pieces of the ingenious bomb his later years revealed how to assemble and detonate. Along the way, there's no "Eureka," no dramatic breakthrough, only the accumulating evidence of small changes. Maybe that's what Frances Senska, his teacher at Montana State College (1946–50), meant when she said that he never had an early style, that he "started out 'grown up.'" He knew his own subject, but lacked the device to convey it. So, early in the Eisenhower era, we find him rummaging for one he could improve with constant adjustments.

As a sculptor, he seemed to sweat along behind Henry Moore and Jacques Lipchitz. His trail was so cautious and tentative, one has to squint to see it leading to the bacchanalian poetry for which he is known. But it does. For in *Three Musicians* (1952) and *Ceramic Horse Head* (1953–54), we glimpse the livestock and people that gradually came to inhabit his pottery forms—albeit, they were prim and sober and apparently not out for the good time their younger relations found. But their rigid formality must have given Autio's impulses something like a good family life—a sound appreciation of the security of structure. If the sculptures were less than frank about his sensuous attachment to the world, it was only because Autio hadn't yet discovered the vital suggestiveness of form, an appreciation he developed through pottery.

From early on, pottery was an area in which the lulling sedative of formality and decorum had either worn off or hadn't been properly administered. There were constraints on expression, but they generally stemmed from utilitarianism. Autio, however, had never really made a staple of useful pots. Even when he and Peter Voulkos had stinted in tableware at Archie Bray's brickyard in Montana, he had used the off hours to produce his own work—sculptures and curious amalgams of pots and club sandwiches made of clay. On the whole, these had little in common with the clay dinosaurs that Rose Slivka, in her 1961 assessment, "The New Ceramic Presence," said were "limited and predetermined by function." That may partly explain why Autio's work received such small notice. Having done so little to advance the old presence—the earth wasn't shifting beneath his wheel—he seemed to slip through the 1950s without making a peep.

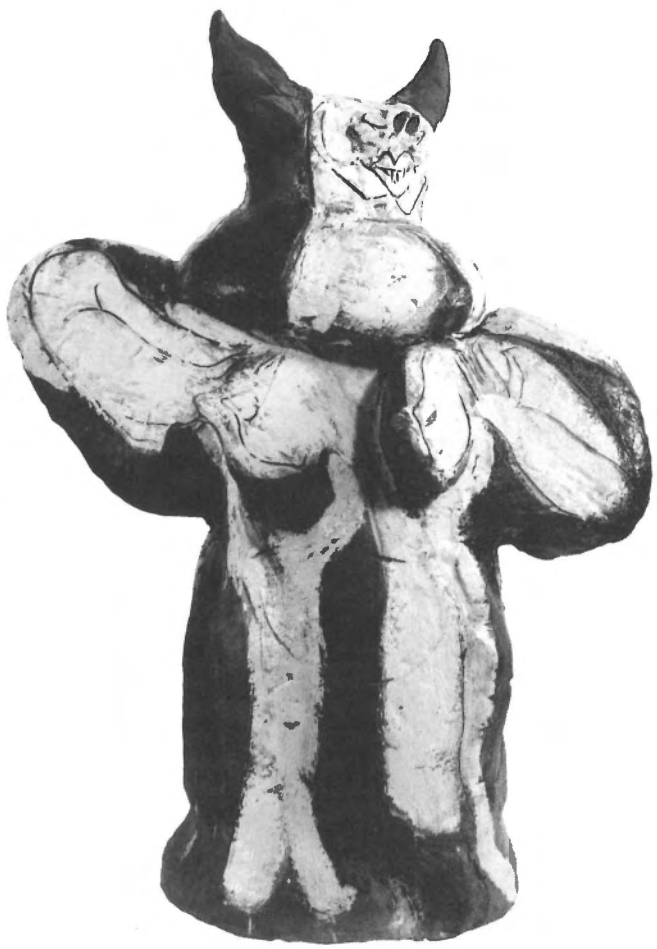
Yet his pots came close to matching Slivka's description of the born-again ceramic, one in which "the classical form has been subjected and even discarded in the interests of surface—an energetic, baroque clay surface with itself the formal canvas." According to Slivka, form and surface—the kind then being produced by Voulkos, John Mason, and the clay army working its way up the coast of California—had tossed aside their harmonious alliance and undertaken a guerrilla struggle for the domain of clay.

Autio's version of the conflict—if it was conflict at all—was more restrained. (Again, the reason may be that he had so little of the old style to purge.) His decorative surfaces had always been more than simply pleasing gravy enlivening the same dull staple. By the same token, his forms were never docile stevedores bearing loads of freer ornamentation. In the late fifties and early sixties, he used color to break into and define form, but never, as Slivka said of the others, to "destroy" it. Autio's forms and surfaces vied for visual strength, but their purposes seemed joined, not crossed, moving toward rather than away from consolidation and lessening disparity.

The forms were concoctions of thrown and shaped cylinders and slabs. Pinched, folded, scored, and creased, their clamorous surfaces showed that Autio's emotions were in his fingers. They worked feverishly to convey what they knew to his eyes. The volumes themselves seemed to squirm, anxious to find room and comfort for the awkward bulges in their developing anatomy. Initially, this amounted to a generalized torso—no arms or legs and only the slightest suggestion of head. It was the implicit human anatomy that has shadowed pottery through hundreds of tumbled-down civilizations. And its gender was never in doubt. By the early sixties, the figure emerging from Autio's bags of clay was female. She appeared alone, in groups, and occasionally with critters on the hoof and wing. Autio's sculptural themes and subjects were beginning to merge with the techniques and sensibility of pottery.

Vessel (1982), 20" (51 cm) high. Courtesy Morgan Gallery, St. Louis. Photo: E. G. Schempf.

Beauty and the Beast *(1979), 40" (100 cm) high, stoneware. Collection of Earl Millard, Belleville, Illinois. Photo: James Ropiequet Schmidt.*



Aino's Night Flight *(1984), 12½" x 14½" x 15" (32 x 37 x 38 cm), porcelain. Collection Robins, Zelle, Larson and Kaplan, Minneapolis. Photo: George Heinrich.*

The clearest landmark along that quiet stretch of Autio's career is *Flesh Pot* (1963). It presides over his relatively modest previous works like one of those gargantuan water tanks that invariably command hilltops at the outskirts of small towns. And he begins to run with the town kids who scale the gland at night to scrawl lascivious scenes on its walls.

I don't know whether this was the first pot that Autio decorated with drawings of his muses. Nevertheless, it displays a prescient though clumsier example of his later signature. Its decoration was laid out fully in the round and its form was governed by a simple, powerful silhouette—a massive rounded shoulder capped by a comical sombrero lid. However, these two elements—the line of volumetric form and that of the surface drawing—were virtually autonomous. They seemed to synopsize the voluptuousness that more recent pots show he had in mind. Still, something was going pleasantly awry. And it's nice, though fatuous, to think that from that point on Autio's studious formality cracked, allowing something warmer, stickier—the real blood of his vision—to seep through.

This isn't to say that Autio's formality has acted solely as an impediment to the emergence of a "looser"—remember that term?—more pelvic art. Stepping back from his career, it becomes clear that his formality gradually developed into an inconspicuous yet effective structure for the more irrational currents of his expression. The cloud-like voluptuousity of lines circulating the globe of *Flesh Pot* intensified in later works. Jumping ahead twenty years to *Gemini Vessel*, *Bitterroot Appaloosa* and *Rolling Horse* (all 1984), we see this compelling linearity better controlled, the figures larger and more descriptive. Not a realistic descriptiveness, but an emotional one which he achieved by developing the sensuous force of his drawn line, a sensuousness which over the years has sharpened without dulling or obscuring the identity of its natural sources. Through this evocative line, his fingers passed his emotions to his eyes.

It took hold of the contours of the forms. So, like the surface drawings, the vessel shapes became focussed improvisations on the natural form—the female nude, birds, fishes, horses, rams, earth and moving water and sky—that attracted and moved him.

This double improvisation yielded simplified, abstracted forms. Autio reduced the explicit volumetric torsos to cruciforms, a configuration that was by no means new in his art. In the fifties, it had cropped up in the carved brick murals he executed for Gold Hill Lutheran Church, Butte, Montana, and other churches; and then again in a less obvious way in a number of pots he made toward the end of the decade, their looping handles winging outward from their central cylinders. Not a precise and well-formed cross, but crooked, asymmetric, schematic—apparent only after some consideration. More recently, in such pots as *Victorville Ladies* (1980) and *Blue Lady Sleeping, One Awakening* (1981), it immediately frames the form. By drawing the eye to its irregular but simple volumetric profile, it establishes the terms of our experience of the pot.

Certainly, Autio must have realized this, for he appears to have begun using these volumetric outlines to awaken rather than merely accommodate the linear power and sensuosity of the surface drawings. He began to *draw* the hollow shapes more completely. Thus he made them convey in a glance the emotional sense their surfaces revealed only over time. Like the animals that primeval man incised and painted on the outcropping walls of caves, Autio's drawings appeared to bring out the innate forms of the underlying clay. This wasn't simply a matter of the surfaces illustrating what their forms already conveyed—though in weaker works this does occur—but one of empathy between their effects. Without erasing the essential distinctions of the two, it enabled his eye to easily bridge its separate awareness of them, to see them with a highly mobile and unifying gaze.

In *Covered Vessel* (1965),[1] for example, the brocades of clay squiggles protruding from the sides of the form in one instant define the abstracted "Mrs. Butterworth" profile of the pot and in the next merge with the surface field of lyrical embroidery, coloring, and free drawing. Even though this wonderful pot is two-sided—as are most of the earlier cruciforms—it shows that Autio was beginning to see them whole. He had discovered how to make the eye move, how to reel it over the surface, from detail to detail, without snagging it on an isolated part. As I've already mentioned, he succeeded by drawing

his shapes and surfaces comprehensively, the surfaces resulting from direct improvisations on the forms. And as we move out of the sixties we can practically hear Autio tuning his little orchestra, preparing for his symphonies of the past few years.

Bolder, sharper, and at the same time more sensuous than any previous work, the pots he began making in 1980 followed a period of relative quiet, if not hibernation. *Victorville Ladies* and *Cutthroat* (both 1980) reveal that Autio's expression of linearity had become almost fluid. Every line rippled. The cruciform was considerably less rigid, its profile less rectilinear, rounder, the protuberant edges seemed to originate from deeper within the form. They became finlike. This is apparent in the porcelain works he completed during his 1981 residency at Arabia china works in Helsinski.

At the same time, his use of porcelain seemed to sharpen his control and broaden his technique. Until then, Autio had been executing his drawings primarily by scratching through white or pigmented engobes to the dark stoneware underbody. Using porcelain, he was able to replace the previously sharp contrast of darks and lights with one ranging wider in middle grays and off- whites. The pale body of the clay lent his surfaces a buoyancy.

It seemed to force Autio to examine the variety of his surface markings, making him more attentive and responsive to the relative weights and values of all the visual components of the pots. Incised lines mixed with painted and drawn lines, and these, in turn, merged with the curling seams of overlaid clay walls. So in addition to the brightened palette, there appears a subtler complexion of marks, a thoroughness which became even more so as he began to escape the two-sidedness of his earlier cruciform pots.

In *Three Geishas* (1981), *Two Ladies and Bull* (1981), and *Magic Horses of Columbia Gardens* (1983), the surface drawings are no longer halved by the generalized profile of the cross. The cross is there, but it no longer divides the form. Instead, it appears as the eye moves around the pot. Not in two wings, but in several, the drawings now incorporate its distinctive profile in a larger, circumferential scheme. In earlier cruciform pots, the drawings rarely led the eye around the corners. Autio decorated their divided surfaces in a piecemeal manner. In short, he was decorating a surface, not conceiving a space.

The difference, I think, becomes clear when one compares *Rolling Horse*, *Bitterroot Appaloosa*, and *Gemini* (all 1984) with almost any of his previous works. These latest pots are by far his strongest, their drawings fulfilling the power of their forms.

The figures seem both to emanate from and to swim around the organic contours of the forms. They widen and narrow, adjusting to the breathing hollow. Simplified, their outlines retain only those features that fortify the aim of the whole. Through this remarkable economy of means, Autio has been able to articulate not only what his eyes see, but also what his mind knows; namely, his sensuous attachment to the world. And he conveys it through the experience of pure, circumferential line, one that appeals directly to the senses. As it entwines the pot, it describes women, men, animals, and landforms. And these, in turn, evoke themes of sensual adventure, pleasure, tension, and contentment. But their impact and heartfelt meaning does not come from this recognition alone. It derives from the open-minded experience of the movement of incised and colored lines over undulant volumes of clay. This movement—its quickening and lingering pace of rises and falls, ins and outs—awakens the eye to its free but highly focussed range, one that encompasses and binds all the visual and conceptual elements of the pot. Thus, we see the particular character of Autio's expression of space. Not the highly formalized space of his earliest sculptures, nor the tactile one of his earliest pots, but a dream space in which the most irrational urges of his psyche appear, transformed, in linear equivalents. Figures of people and animals romp and float in a directionless but enveloping atmosphere. Not up, not down, but around and around, their eroticism borne by the rich suggestiveness of a hollow clay device with a hole in the top.

1. In the collection of the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, but not in this exhibition.

Rudy Autio's work was recently on view at the American Craft Museum, New York (September 14–November 3, 1984) and at Garth Clark Gallery, New York (September 11–October 6, 1984). An upcoming exhibition will take place at Traver Sutton Gallery, Seattle, May 2–June 1, 1985.

Edward Lebow received a 1984 fellowship for Critical Writing from the National Endowment for the Arts, funds from which supported this article.

Two Ladies Averting the Angry Swallow *(1982), 18" (45.7 cm) high, stoneware. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, New York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

Bitterroot Appaloosa *(1984), 16" x 12" x 13" (40.6 x 30.5 x 33 cm), porcelain. Collection Martin and Dawn Bennett Davidson. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, New York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

Arthur González: Of Melodramas, Movie Stars, and Modern Times

William Zimmer

Arthur González was born in 1954 and grew up in Sacramento, California. Later, as a student at the American River College in Sacramento, González was trained as a photorealist, but found that process too tight and organized for his more expressive desires. He remembers that his brushes and palette were always dirty; he would lose the caps to his paint tubes and generally felt the process to be "too Zen" to allow him to be creative. After two years, he transferred to Sacramento State University, where he received a BA in painting in 1977 and an MA in painting in 1979. In 1981, he earned his MFA in clay sculpture from the University of California, Davis, where he studied with Robert Arneson and Manuel Neri, both of whom he cites as influences, along with his friend ceramist Robert Brady, who acted as a big brother—taking González along to workshops, lectures, and exhibitions —and generally opened his eyes to other art and artists.

González began working with clay by throwing slabs on the floor and shaping them into sculptural forms in an aggressive, therapeutic fashion. The pieces gradually became more three-dimensional, more sculptural. In high school, he had enjoyed making "things" out of found objects that were similar to Lucas Samaras's boxes, and this original interest is apparent in his subsequent work. He works in a collagelike, slap-dash manner, and still considers himself an object-maker rather than an image-maker, creating three-dimensional forms in space rather than an illusion of space.

González continues to make drawings, however, which are often therapeutic and intuitive like his early clay slab work. Although the drawings may develop ideas for the sculptures, he asserts that they are not drawings of sculpture. He works in clay primarily because it is malleable, cheap, and accessible, and because it is adaptable to his visions. He doesn't think of himself as a technician or a craftsperson, but rather as one who is approaching the process backwards, in a sort of "on the job training" manner.

González watches a lot of old movies on television and many ideas for his sculptures come from memories of the actors of Hollywood's "Golden Age," as well as from current movies and magazine movie stills. González thinks the layer of safety inherent in film, the distance generated by being "make-believe," is often repeated in our lives as a protection and he thinks of his own life as somewhat melodramatic, like an old movie. Having lived in a number of places, he feels each location has affected his art by changing him. He considers himself an optimist who believes his relationships with other people are of the utmost importance.

—Wendy Dubin

Untitled *(1984), 22" x 30" (56 x 76 cm), charcoal pastel on paper. Courtesy Sharpe Gallery, New York. Photo: David Lubarsky.*

While the sculptures of Arthur González are splendid and engaging in themselves, they also serve as reminders of a heroic and witty past. However, until the recent exhibition, "The Diversions of Keramos, 1925–1950," brought Waylande Gregory and other clay sculptors of that era to light, this figurative tradition has been largely overlooked. Whether portrait busts of Hollywood stars or creatures of his imagination (witness those that cavorted on the *Fountain of the Atom* at the 1939 World's Fair), Gregory's exuberant output surely set the stage for such later full-fledged sculptors as Robert Arneson, Viola Frey, and David Gilhooly. When such a strong lineage is established, one is anxious to see it continue. The recent work of González, a young artist from Northern California, now living in New York, assures us that this unique tradition lies in good, clay-covered hands.

González's body of work—human bodies depicted from the waist or chest up—comprise the different aspects of a protean personality. That personality is frequently in whiteface, a device that marks a sharp contrast with the natural earth color of ceramic. White reminds one not only of the make-up of clown or actor, but of potter's slip; it is surely one of González's intentions to "give the slip," to stay conceptually and psychologically elusive while being formally precise.

That precision comes from his artistic roots; González began his serious career as a photorealist painter. This training in clarity and exactitude is something to which he can resort when he has to make a decision, such as whether to give one of his creations a claw or a full, five-fingered hand.

Yet another, even more surprising tradition supersedes photorealism in the genesis of his sculpture—minimal art. The pronounced elipse across the front of the figure, *Time Traveler*, is a sort of homage to minimalism, especially, González avers, to Carl Andre and Ellsworth Kelly. "That's the real craft," González says of the minimalists, "those pieces which are about how little we can show and still bring about one-hundred-percent perception. To make it count, it has to be done with impeccable craftsmanship." In González's art, this philosophy of "leaving out" reveals itself rather literally. "I never gave my figures legs, not even my free-standing ones. I try to be aware of what's necessary and not necessary."

It may be assumed that González doesn't have much time for that separation between the so-called fine arts and crafts. But of course he is aware of the issue, and states his attitude laconically: "Painting is a craft, essentially; and while a pot, let's say, is a product of an acknowledged craft, it has to have something beyond mere craftsmanship to be truly beautiful." The artist speaks this with a mien that reveals he understands the nature of a true pot, but he also readily confesses that he himself had never thrown on the wheel until last year, when it was required for a course he was teaching.

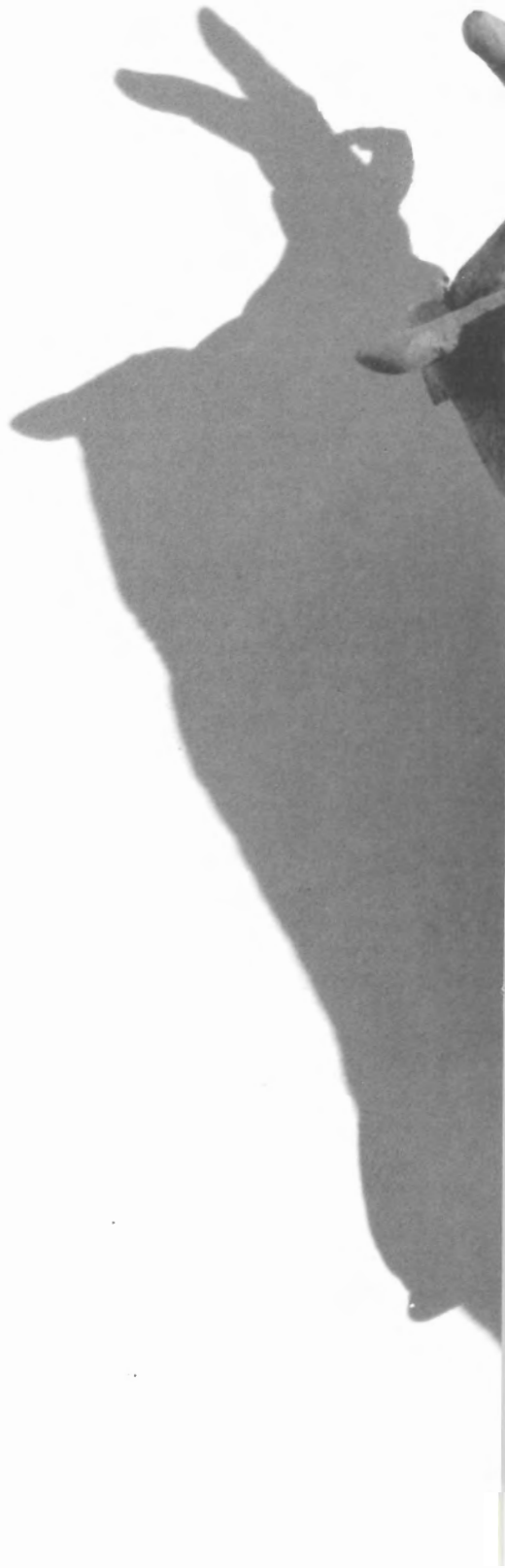
How does an idea get fully realized as a painstakingly made sculpture? What is González's mode of operation? He singles out his recent *Log Fetcher* (1984), a character in a coonskin cap cradling pieces of wood, who wears a black mask around his eyes like a racoon. "That piece was inspired by some logs on the sidewalk; some of them are actually incorporated into the piece. I'm usually inspired by a quick thought or impression. I write these ideas down, and then make drawings."

"Next," says González, "the 'sincerity factor' comes into play. As he goes through the motions, the artist must really be on the ball. This is perhaps why I can't make more than a couple of pieces a month. But there is that sensation at the end—the sensation of finally being able to lift up that original thought."

One of the thoughts that becomes a leitmotif in González's work is his meditation on what he calls the "enculturation of beauty." In its most elementary form, this manifests itself in the familiar ritual of applying make-up, and this is where González's whiteface has precise, if mundane, symbolism. "When women apply cold cream to their faces, they are willingly, but temporarily, taking on ugliness for a beauty which must be renewed daily." The impermanence of this action is allied to the fact that there is no fixed standard of beauty in the world. Values are temporary and ephemeral. Therefore it is fitting that the material González chooses to work in, although universal and durable, is also fragile.

The acts of this artist's life abet this

Cheater *(1984), 26" (66 cm) high, clay. Courtesy Sharpe Gallery, New York. Photo: D. James Dee.*



proclivity to dip in and out of cultures, and to see cultural standards as relative. González boasts that he is a rarity, a fourth-generation Californian in this age of recent transplants to the Pacific coast. He didn't leave the Sacramento nest until he was twenty-two, for he feels close to his family. His father was a weekend artist who set up his oil paints once a week in their kitchen and painted a landscape or a pirate ship. But when González's mother enrolled her husband in a night course in painting at a local elementary school, he refused to attend. Thus Arthur, age seven, was recruited in his place and attended class every week. (Eventually his father became allergic to the smell of oil paint and stopped painting altogether as his son's ability surpassed his own.) One speculates whether this turning upside down of the usually patriarchal family nudged González toward his wide-open, egalitarian position in which all manner of marginal, usually funky, folk exist with determination, seemingly *sui generis*.

One of these, the spacey-looking *Time Traveler*, is a surrogate for the artist. His own trips—the first was with the ceramic sculptor Robert Barry to Los Angeles—may not be exotic, but he has been on the road a lot. He feels especially comfortable in the South, where he has had several teaching assignments. These trips provide him the occasion to indulge in his favorite preoccupation—observing.

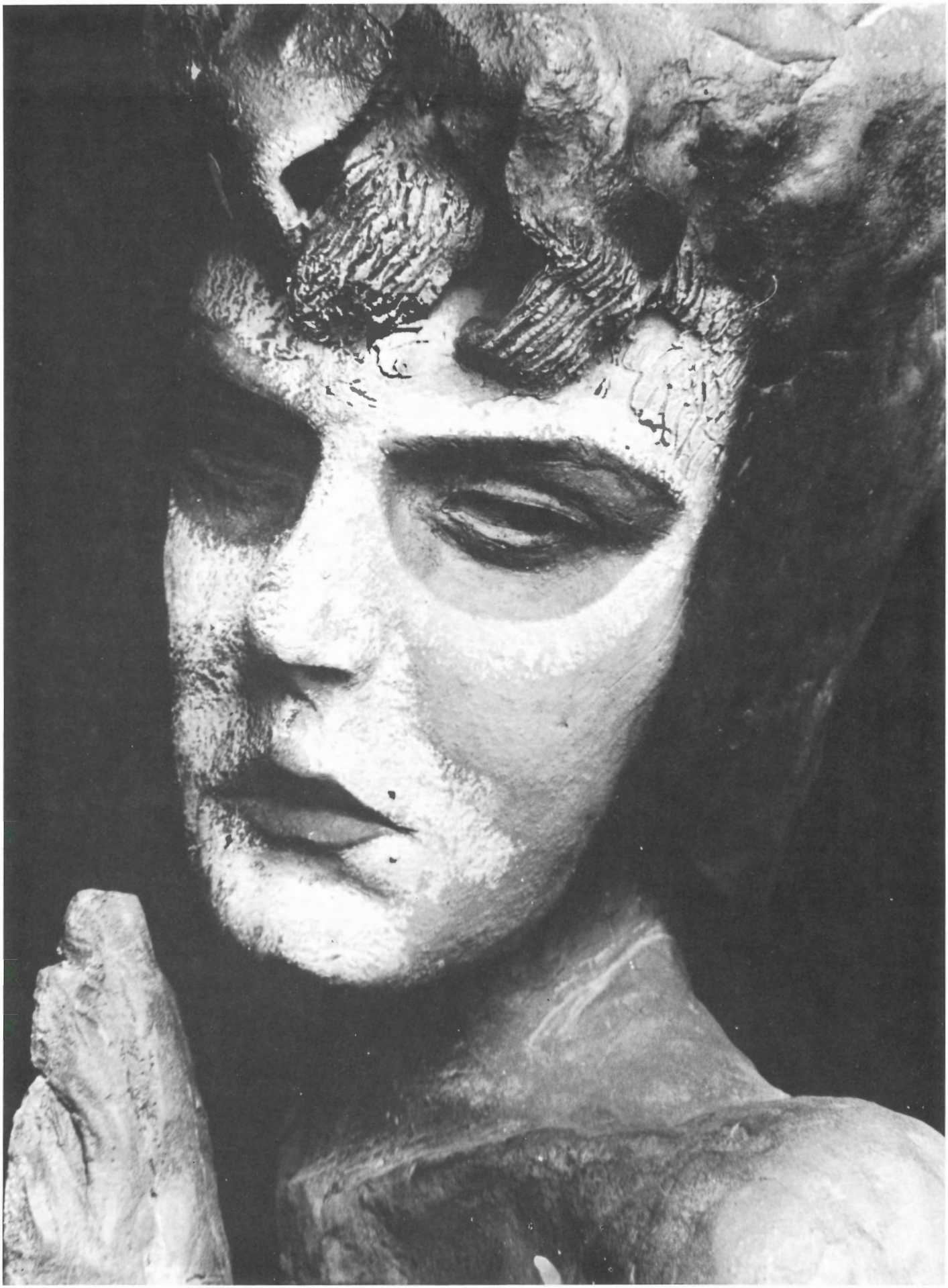
He lives in Brooklyn—hanging-out-and-watching-people capital of the world—while his gallery, Deborah Sharpe, is located in the Lower East Side—turf ripe with "interesting people." The intensity of that scene, embodied in the new Expressionism, doesn't faze him. "I'm an observer there," says González, in the same detached tone he might use to say, "I'm passing through." The limpid passage of ideas is an ultimate hallmark of Arthur González's art. No idea, however ephemeral, is automatically stopped, no art form or material denied. He sees precedents. "Marisol," he said as a parting shot, "is able to use any art movement from 1984 back." It is clear González aims at the same lucidity.

Arthur González lives and maintains a studio in Brooklyn, New York, and is represented by Sharpe Gallery, New York.

William Zimmer is an art critic for the New York Times *and has recently written an essay for an exhibition entitled "Abstract Painting as Surface and Object" for Hillwood Art Gallery, C.W. Post College, Greenvale, New York.*

Time Traveler *(1984), 28" (71 cm) high, clay. Courtesy Sharpe Gallery, New York. Photo: D. James Dee.*

(Detail) Math Problem *(1984), 30" (76 cm) high, clay. Courtesy Sharpe Gallery, New York. Photo: Robert Noble.*



When I found the potter's wheel, I felt it all over like a wild duck in water.

Garth Clark

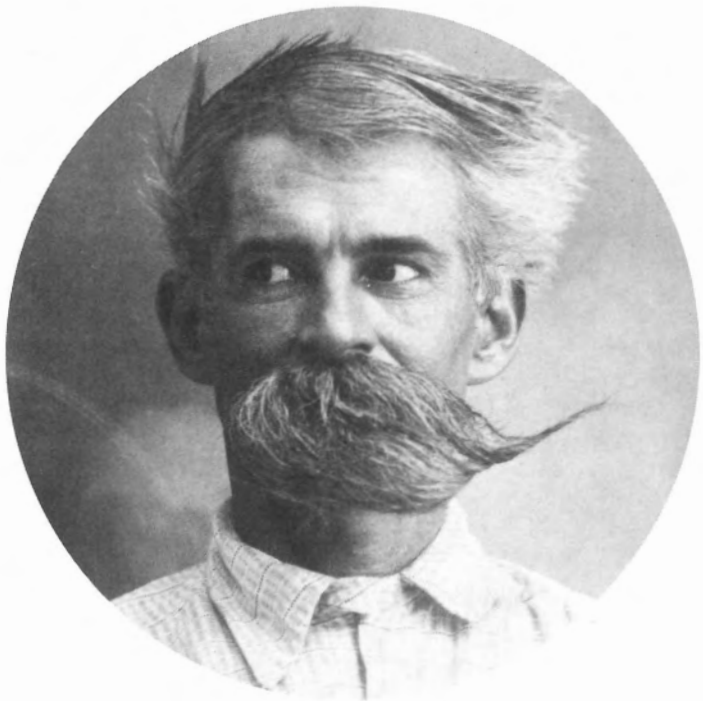
In 1893, an event of seemingly little consequence occurred in the small town of Biloxi, Mississippi: the pottery of a little-known clay worker by the name of George E. Ohr burned to the ground. In common with all calamities of this kind, it must have caused considerable disruption and financial discomfort to the victim. But the fire had another, more propitious effect. It appears to have ignited a smouldering radicalism in Mr. Ohr, who thereafter began to produce some of the most unique pottery in modern times.

Ohr has since emerged as an enigmatic prophet whose anticipation of the concerns of modern art extends teasingly into the realm of Dada and Surrealist object-making, whose inventive ceramic art was not to be equalled until the arrival of Peter Voulkos and Company in the 1950s. Critic (and now photographer) John Coplans described him as a "pre-Dada Dadaist and pre-Surrealism Surrealist."[1] Coplan's pronouncement rings true because the only words we have to describe Ohr and his complex motivations are, by necessity, drawn from the vocabulary of these and other art movements that came after him.

Unlike most artists of his day, who came from reasonably genteel and middle-class backgrounds, Ohr was the son of a Biloxi blacksmith. He received little formal education and certainly none in the liberal arts. At first he was apprenticed to his father, but, always the prankster, Ohr admits he was constantly "running away from danger and getting caught with open arms every time"; their working relationship proved to be stormy and difficult.

In 1879, after three years of working in New Orleans for a ship's chandler, a family friend, Joseph Fortune Meyer, offered to take on the wild twenty-two year old as an apprentice in his pottery. For Ohr this represented the opportunity to earn ten dollars a week and "the chance to swipe a trade." Ohr remained with Meyer (who later became renowned as the potter for Newcombe Pottery) only long enough to know "how to boss a little piece of clay into a gallon jug." He then departed on a two-year trip through sixteen States, where he "sized up every potter and pottery...and never missed a shop window, illustration or literary dab on ceramics."

Ohr returned to his hometown of Biloxi and set about building his



George E. Ohr, as photographed by himself. Courtesy University Museum, University of Mississippi.

own pottery with the capital sum of $26.80. He had the benefit of his skill as a blacksmith and was able to build his own potter's wheel and clay mill. He sawed pine trees and rafted the wood eighteen miles down the Tchoutibuffe River to Biloxi and singlehandedly erected the pottery buildings. The kiln was fashioned "like a mud wasp," with "lime and grit and credit."

As soon as the pottery was complete, he began to make work for the 1883 New Orleans Cotton Exposition. It cost him his entire savings to turn up at the fair with 600 pots ("no two alike"), only to have his entire stock carted away by a bogus shipper. As one can imagine, the early days were financially difficult and, were it not for the "housewives who have a constant need of flower pots, water coolers and flues," the pottery (or "Pot-Ohr-Ree" as he preferred to describe it) would not have survived. Among these early wares were slip-cast pitchers decorated in relief with riverboats and other local scenes. Ohr seemed to use the potter's wheel mainly to produce the functional items that were his mainstay. He was, however, entranced by the wheel from the first moment he worked at one, exclaiming that he "felt it all over like a wild duck in water." Ohr developed extraordinary dexterity at the wheel (historian Paul Evans says he was quite probably "the most expert thrower the craft has ever known")[2] and his skills were no doubt encouraged by his predilection for showmanship. Performing tricks on the wheel at the various fairs was a sales promotion device for which he became quite famous.

The first "mature" works did not make an appearance until about 1895. (Most of 1894 was taken up with building a new pottery whose imposing structure curiously resembled a pagoda.) By 1896, Ohr's shelves were lined with thousands of works in his new style. They were magical clay structures, paper thin, manipulated in the most plastic and imaginative manner. Edges were folded, ruffled, wrinkled, pinched, and reformed in every conceivable shape. Pots were twisted at their necks or shoulders so that they collapsed into a series of rhythmic pleats. Tendrillike handles emerged from his forms, curling forth something like the trees that populate the streets of Biloxi.

Decades later, an admiring Jean Cocteau said of the doves that Picasso fashioned by twisting and folding thrown clay forms, "you wring their necks and give them life!" The same paradox is true in Ohr's pots. All the distortions—the pummeling, tearing, folding, and other "violence" against the classical lines of the vessel—only enhance their vitality.

Although most of Ohr's early wares were glazed in a standard clear lead glaze or a smoky black metallic one, soon he was producing the most extravagant range of polychrome glazes. In general, he derived his techniques from either the T'ang three-color wares of the Chinese potters or from the related spatter-wares of American folk potters. Interestingly, a connection with the glazing techniques of Bernard Palissy, the French Mannerist (1510–1589), has also emerged, which I shall discuss later.

Ohr came to regret his success as a glaze chemist, however, as it caused too many of his contemporaries to dismiss his forms as eccentric. (Edwin Atlee Barber's evaluation is typical: "the principal beauty of the ware lies in the richness of his glazes."[3]) That Ohr saw form as his primary statement, not glazing, is confirmed by words he scribbled in anger across a photograph of unglazed wares: "Colors and quality counts nothing in my creations...God put no color or quality in souls."

Even today the obsession with colored glazes continues among Ohr's collectors, although the forms are now equally admired. Such writers as Eugene Hecht have drawn attention to the fact that Ohr's biscuit pots are not simply those that did not make the trip to the glaze bucket, but are in fact complete statements and that in many cases Ohr never intended them to be glazed.[4] Unfortunately, the demand for the more lavish glazes has motivated present-day counterfeiters to glaze Ohr's bisque pots, usually with obvious and appalling vulgarity, and then sell these as original works.

Another dimension to Ohr's personality was his involvement in what we today call text-art—the combination of the visual and the verbal. A photograph of Ohr shows him and his son Geo holding a framed banner that reads, "events are fruits, words are leaves"; he scribbled numerous legends such as this across his pots as well, and in one case addressed a lengthy letter to the Smithsonian Institution around a

Crinkled Vessel *(1895–1908), 5" (12.5 cm) high, earthenware. Collection Jasper Johns. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, New York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

Double-Handled Vase *(n.d.), 9½" (24 cm) high, earthenware. Collection Andrew Crispo, New York. Courtesy University Museum, University of Mississippi.*

large jardinère. Ohr's relish for visual/verbal puns in the spirit of Duchamp is long in advance of Robert Arneson and artists of the Funk movement, who popularized this form of expression in contemporary ceramics. Typical is a pair of top hats (now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution): the first hat, pristine and perfect, is entitled *Seven O'Clock on the Evening*, while the second, battered, dented, and torn, is entitled *Three O'Clock in the Morning*. Ohr's interests did not begin and end with the pottery, although it was his central obsession. He also indulged his taste for bizarre photography, and took great pains to set up "trick" photographs of himself and his family. One is particularly interesting and appears to have been taken after the fire of 1893 that destroyed his pottery. Ohr placed each of his children in a clay vessel, and even made a large clay eggshell for one of the children's stuffed toys. This act of optimism goes much further than simply trying to salvage a moment of humor out of a tragic event. In putting his children inside "clay babies," as he referred to his pots, perhaps Ohr was linking the act of potting to that of divine creation. For the artist's insistence upon making "no two pots alike" was not motivated by a desire for commercial success, but by Ohr's profound belief in the Individual, which was confirmed in his mind by the fact that God created no two people alike.

In talking of his work, Ohr constantly summoned up the dual metaphors of anthropomorphism and theophanic creation. In Ohr's willful individualism, we see more than a trace of such kindred spirits as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.

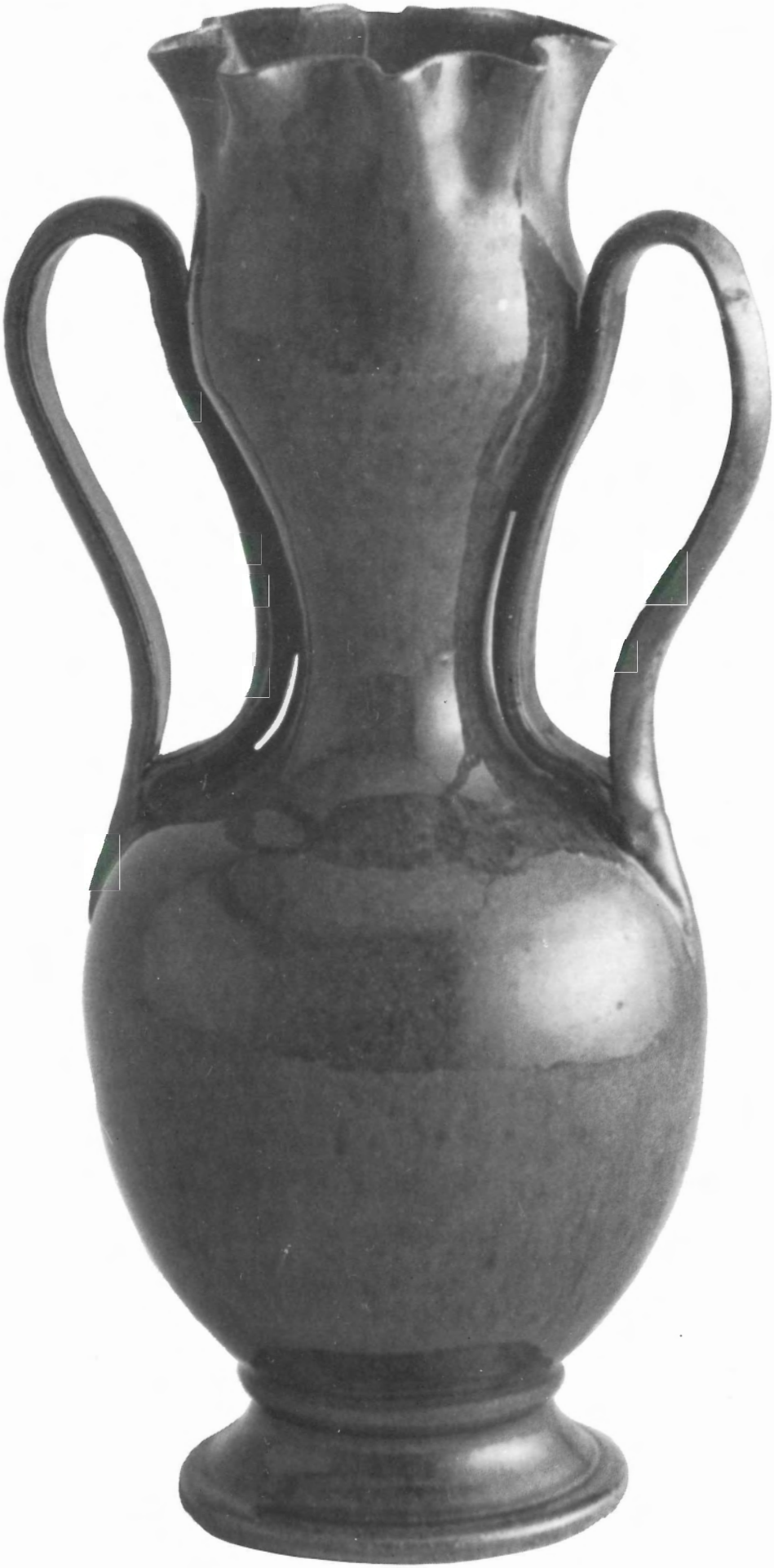
Ohr's acceptance in his own day was mixed. He seems to have been reasonably well known in Arts and Crafts circles as a "character" at the turn of the century, and a few discerning eyes saw him as something more than a Southern raconteur. But the difficulty for Ohr was that he did not come from the correct social stratum to be accepted into the Arts and Crafts Movement. He had not acquired the necessary veneer of education and refinement and his theatrical self-promotion (engaging in street theatre and posting signs at fairs declaring himself to be "The Greatest Art Potter on Earth") did not sit well with his more august contemporaries. Typical is the judgment of Frederick Hurten Rhead, an English potter who had moved to the United States and had assumed the role of critic and commentator on the ceramic arts: "Entirely without art training and altogether lacking in taste, he deliberately distorted every pot he made in order to be violently different from any other potter."[5] And William Percival Jervis, writing in *The Encyclopedia of Ceramics*, belittled Ohr's achievement in a mordant passage that concludes:

Mr. Ohr with unbounded confidence in his own genius is laying up at Biloxi a vast store of ware in the hope that it may be purchased entire by the nation as an example of his prowess. Did we but accept him at his own estimate he is not only the foremost potter in America but in the whole world...he said so and he ought to know.[6]

A few critics responded more positively and intelligently to Ohr's pots, among them Charles Fergus Binns, founding director of the New York State College for Clayworking and Ceramics, Edwin Atlee Barber, and William A. King.

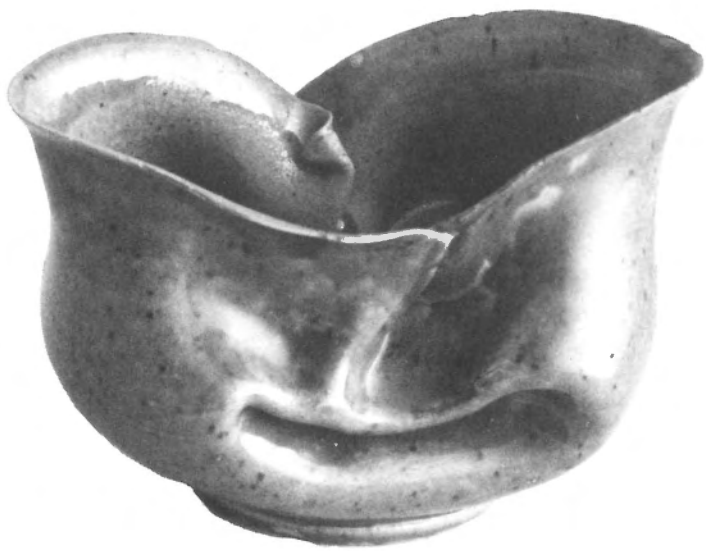
After the fire of 1893, in addition to a radical shift in his forms and surfaces, Ohr also began to exhibit an eccentric attitude to sales. Convinced that his work would be "purchased entire" by the nation, he sometimes refused to sell his best pieces. There are stories of collectors coming to Biloxi to purchase work, only to have a distressed Ohr turn up at the railway station to buy back the pieces he had just sold. He did continue to make gimcracks and somewhat lewd novelties for fairs, but around 1904 he inherited some money from his father and within the next few years (between 1906 and 1909) ceased working as a potter altogether. He acquired a Thor motorcycle for his own pleasure and assisted his son Geo in his newly established Cadillac dealership. When Ohr died in 1918, over 7,000 pots, the major portion of his mature production, lay stored away and forgotten in the family warehouse.

In 1967, an antiques dealer from upstate New York, J. W. Carpenter, stumbled upon the cache. After five years of negotiation, he acquired the work in 1972 for a rumored $50,000. Carpenter published a catalogue and, virtually overnight, the historians of the Arts



Multicolored Crinkled Vase *(1895–1908), 8" (20.3 cm) high, earthenware. Collection Marcel and Rose Jederman. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, New York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

Vagina Pot *(n.d.), 3" (8 cm) high, earthenware. Collection Estelle and Martin Shack, Bellmore, New York. Courtesy University Museum, University of Mississippi.*



and Crafts movement had to reconsider Ohr's contribution. The reevaluation was not entirely positive.

As late as 1978, the curator of ceramics at the Smithsonian Institution tried to discourage me from including Ohr in the exhibition, "A Century of Ceramics in the United States," on the grounds that his inclusion would be "embarrassing" to American decorative arts. "You may think Ohr is an artist," he sniffed, "but *we* think he is just plain hokey!"

While the decorative art world was having some difficulty coming to terms with the reappearance of this rude country potter, the contemporary art world had no such inhibitions and took to Ohr from the outset. The first pieces I saw of Ohr's were in the collection of John Coplans. Dealer Irving Blum was another early collector, soon followed by his colleagues Miani Johnson (Willard Gallery), Andrew Crispo, Charles Cowles, and Allan Frumkin. Soon several adventurous contemporary collectors joined in, including Arthur and Carol Goldberg, Carl Lobell, the arts attorney and collector of early American modernist painting and sculpture, and the Jedermans, whose collection of early photography and Dada memorabilia is well known.

A most striking indication of Ohr's appeal to the art world was seen in last year's exhibition of paintings by Jasper Johns at Leo Castelli Gallery; prominent among the images were the Ohr pots Johns has acquired for his own collection. Blum saw the inclusion of these pots as "a tender homage to a great early American artist." Such support from an art audience usually unresponsive to ceramics (particularly of Ohr's period) is less surprising when we consider that some of these enthusiasts—Blum, Frumkin, Cowles, and Coplans—have had more than a passing connection with twentieth-century ceramics and could perceive the affinities between Ohr and contemporary artists such as Voulkos and Arneson. Carl Lobell, on the other hand, had no interest in Ohr's pivotal historical position. He simply saw the work of an artist "who taught me more about the illusion of volume and weight than any other artist I had yet encountered."

The erotic suggestiveness of vessels formed into vaginal shapes, the verbal-visual play with words, objects, and banal humor, the sense of risk—all connected Ohr not only with the mainstreams of contemporary ceramics, but with concerns that had energized American painting and sculpture throughout the forties and fifties. When I first saw Ohr's more erotic works, I recognized the same satiric sensibility to be found in Duchamp's *Fig Leaf* and *Wedge of Chastity*, a correspondence that I noted in my first writings on Ohr. During a later discussion with the Jedermans, I was surprised to discover that not only did they collect Ohr, but they also owned Duchamp's *Wedge* and that it was this very connection that had attracted them to Ohr.

The art historian can be seduced easily into linking Ohr with subsequent art movements, and while Ohr undeniably encompassed a whole range of future expressions in art, it now became necessary to trace those works of the past that had excited and inspired him. To some extent, this was as speculative as connecting Ohr to works made after his death, for the potter left very few clues as to his inspiration. One of the most interesting of these was the potter's reference to himself as the "second Palissy." Palissy was as much a maverick and an inventive genius as Ohr and was notorious for, among other things, throwing his furniture into the kiln when he ran out of fuel. On one occasion, his wife awoke to find him ripping the bedroom doors off their hinges—Palissy was firing again! Eventually his experiments paid off and he was appointed "The Inventor of the King's Rustic Pottery" in 1562, creating one of the most important bodies of Renaissance pottery.

I had assumed, as had one of Ohr's contemporaries, that the potter saw this connection as a spiritual one. With his own hands he fired the kiln, using wood for the purpose; one can easily imagine that, like Palissy, if his wood and money ran short at a critical moment in the firing, he might be capable of breaking up his furniture to keep up his fire.[7] My view changed, however, upon a tour of the vaults at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Peter Fusco, then curator of decorative arts, had just acquired a group of Palissy wares and a single Ohr vase. When I turned over the Palissy wares, I found to my surprise that the dappled, multihued glazes of the French master's pots were strikingly similar to Ohr's surfaces; indeed, they almost

Palette *(n.d.), 7½" x 8" x 1⅛" (19 x 20 x 3 cm), earthenware. Collection Patti Lel Smith Zanone. Courtesy University Museum, University of Mississippi.*

Pitcher *(n.d.), 3½" (9 cm) high, earthenware. Collection Orin Davidson Smith. Courtesy University Museum, University of Mississippi.*

comprised a catalogue of Ohr glazes. Then I began to see the similarity in Ohr's modeled pitchers and in his penchant for lizards, snakes, and other reptiles. Although Ohr's debt to Palissy is only conjecture at this point, the weight of evidence does seem to point to a deeper and more deliberate involvement in the aesthetic example of Palissy wares than had been previously considered.

Correspondences to other pottery forms abound. Ohr's characteristic teapots have the general stance and the tensely drawn spouts and handles of early Wheildon/Wedgewood wares (where similar multicolored glazing was also popular). Some of Ohr's vessels with many rings of clay ruffles are very similar to sixth-century proto-Yeuh funerary urns from China. And in the late nineteenth century, we find other examples with ruffled and pummeled forms, notably those of the Martin Brothers of England and the early, experimental pieces of Rookwood Pottery. None of these earlier potters manipulated form with the same awesome bravado and agility as Ohr, however.

It is also possible that Ohr's inspiration for folded and ruffled edges came from the then-popular Victorian glass, in which the technique was employed in an effetely decorative manner. Again, this is only conjecture until the day when, in common with his pots, a body of writings can be discovered to support or dispel these aesthetic theories.

What our examination of Ohr's work does establish is that his fiery, avant-garde spirit and revolutionary aesthetic was built on the universal touchstones of the pottery aesthetic and its traditions. He was the first American potter to employ his virtuoso craftsmanship, not as a showy end in itself, but as a means of wrenching a unique and personal formal language out of clay.

It is fitting that fate decreed he should be reborn into a sympathetic period when contemporary ceramics was in sophisticated form and when his aesthetic concerns would seem as fresh as today's newspaper. For the scholar, Ohr will remain an enigma. For the collector of art, his work states emphatically that the vessel can be "high" art. For the contemporary potter, he is a particularly intimidating challenge, for one cannot look upon one of his major works without being awed (George would have said "Ohr-ed") by his ability to give a relatively small vessel the formal and spatial complexity of a major work of sculpture. The years to come are not likely to reveal much more of the enigmatic George E. Ohr. Rather, what we will be left with are the more than 7,000 questions he posed about the plastic energy and dynamism of the humble pot.

1. From an interview with the author, March 15, 1975.
2. Paul Evans, *Art Pottery of the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1974), p. 30.
3. Edwin Atlee Barber, *The Pottery and Porcelain of the United States* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901), p. 498.
4. See Eugene Hecht's writings on Ohr in *American Art Pottery*, in particular, "A Chronology with Beasties" (June 1982) and "The Artist and the Bad Guys" (February 1984).
5. See Paul Evans, "Reflections of Frederick Hurten Rhead," *Pottery Collectors Newsletter*, September/October 1980.
6. William Percival Jervis, *The Encyclopedia of Ceramics*, (New York: 1902), p. 112.
7. See Ethel Hutson, "Quaint Biloxi Pottery," *The Clay Worker*, September 1905, p. 226.

Garth Clark is a historian and dealer in twentieth-century ceramic art whose book on George Ohr will soon be complete. He recently organized an exhibition of Ohr's work for his New York gallery, "George E. Ohr: An Artworld Homage," which drew on the collections of artists, art dealers and private collectors (February 12–March 9, 1985). That exhibition has received considerable attention in the press; one of the more interesting articles being that of John Perrault, "Either Ohr," Village Voice, *March 5, 1985. An earlier exhibition of Ohr's work, with a catalogue essay by Clark, was organized by Ron Dale for the University Museum, University of Mississippi; this exhibit also traveled to the High Museum, Atlanta, and the Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.*

Untitled *by Kirk Mangus (1984), 27" x 22" (68 x 55 cm), screenprint. Photo: Peter De Lory.*

Potters and Prints

Jeff Kelley

Clear ideas, which are about all artists have, are shaped mostly by method. Insight plays a minor role, but sometimes ignites a good idea. Even then, the possibility for insight is usually engineered by method, as in science. The difference between artists and scientists has less to do with sources than destinations.

The premise of the "Potters and Prints" portfolio is simple: that clear ideas will not be muddled, nor will their *puissance* be diminished, by new methods. Rather, they will be converted—say, from the spontaneity of ceramics to the precision of printmaking. But clarity is tricky. It is always the condition of something, but never the thing itself. We may have clear ideas, or make objects that express some feeling clearly. In art, we are often confused by clarity because it is new. This confusion is one of art's clearer values.

The challenge to ceramists Jenney Lind, Kirk Mangus, Jim Romberg, Richard Shaw, Bob Sperry, and Akio Takamori was to identify what was already articulate about their ceramic works and convert it to the conditions of printmaking. David Wharton, the Sun Valley Center's master printer, described this process, with a certain weary wisdom, as "collaborating on a compromise."

Each ceramist brought different sets of expectations and aspirations to the printing process. Wharton helped shape those preconceptions, through an ego-technical duel of vision and experience, into a new kind of thinking. That thinking involved the translation of a three-dimensional vocabulary into a two-dimensional context—an immensely complex endeavor. This parlance between the flat and the round is the leitmotif of the "Potters and Prints" portfolio.

Both pots and prints are grounded in process. A pot is an extension of a concentric shaping activity, a version of the throwing ritual. Throwing is a pre-formed, idealized pot. In a sense, a pot is a noun and its shaping procedure is a verb. A print is the product of constant revision, a serial extension of a visual prototype that is a kind of first-stage ideal, an image less finished than proposed. Prints evolve technically toward an imaginary standard of completeness. They modify that standard through concessions to process. A print is half-way between an adjective and an adverb. Both pots and prints are versional, existing as points on the map of process.

Akio Takamori uses line and color to decorate, border, and embellish his amorphous clay forms. Like fleshy envelopes, those forms are part free-standing sculpture, part wall-relief, and part inflated drawing. By drawing upon such an object, the artist locks its identity—as a human figure, an animal, a face—into place. Takamori applies ink to his silk-screens, an animated male/female duet, much as he applies glaze to his sculptures. In effect, paper doubles for clay. The relationship between image and surface is not radically altered by the printing process. In this sense, Takamori did not investigate the relationship between ceramics and printmaking in a way that conceptually extended his art. Even so, embellishment is the nature of decorative modes such as his. Like an Erté stylization of an erotic Picasso, Takamori's animal lovers are projections of desire within the bounds of pre-established taste.

Jim Romberg's totemic, raku sculptures function in a shallow, cubistically fractured space; something like a swelled picture plane. Plates and vessels, often bearing abstract images, are used in conjunction with ceramic fragments that seem like brushmarks hanging in space. It is against the spherical stability of the plates, which are themselves concave canvases, that the fragments appear to hover and shift. One thinks of rising smoke, of brittle gestures, of burnt mirrors—of the firing process.

Romberg's lithograph seems composed of the residue of that process. The density of ink is a metaphor for the density of clay. Degrees of opacity and transparency suggest the coarseness of raku pottery and the soft space that surrounds it. Curvilinear shapes, like an imploded architecture of flat gestures, resemble the profiles and edges of vessels. Color accents the interplay of structure. Romberg's is a cubist curtain, a kind of mechanism in which things change by degree. Something like a kiln.

The carrot is among Kirk Mangus' favorite symbols. It's a versatile vegetable. It reminds us of a vessel, and of a head with an ignoble crown. The difference is that a carrot is contained by the earth and a vessel is a container, often of earth. One thinks of crypts and graves, of the planting cycles. In this context, Mangus' vibrantly colored silk-screen image of a looming, perhaps resurrected, carrot pressing

its face against the picture plane swells into a ceremonial mask. In its simple intensity, the image recalls the ritual props of so-called "primitive" societies. The carrot seems to have inhaled vapors from the spirit world. Two accompanying carrots, each with a red top, stand erect like sentries, or torches. Color—red, yellow, orange, purple, and blue—slams against the eye, but is beaten back by harsh black gestures. At this moment, the mask falls apart as gesture, its energies fractured and dispersed across the paper's surface.

A system of image and color is replaced by a system of gesture.

A certain disembodiment follows, as if the ghost had given up and left its mask, like a vessel, hollow.

The idea of a mask, of course, is analogous with the frontality of the picture plane. Mangus uses that plane with assurance. Moreover, his choppy gestures, blatant hues, and carrot iconography pertain directly to his ceramic vessels, which often threaten to grow. Mangus' mannerisms have been translated, intact, from clay to paper. In his ceramics, symbols hide inside the vessels; in his print, they hide behind a mask. The real mask, of course, is the picture plane.

In her lithograph, Jenney Lind serves up a fish on a platter. There is a pun here; the fish is, and is also on, a dish. Framed by the decorative edge of a platter, which is in turn framed by the ragged edge of the printed field, the fish becomes an image presented, or perhaps offered, as though the print was itself a platter. Colors are like juices. The grainy inks are like sandy waters. A yellow lemon, which echoes the open eye, sets the colors floating by its own abstractness, as if a button. In every visual sense, Lind's print is delectable. It is about feasting with the eye.

The idea of a ceramic vessel slips into the print ironically, vis-a-vis the platter. More interestingly, the platter serves as an internal border that, in registered layers, isolates and serves up the image while being part of the imagery. With intelligent irony, Lind's print echoes the function of a plate in her use of its likeness. The "flatness" shared by each is conflated in an elegant fiction—a kind of fish story.

With his black and white etched engraving, Bob Sperry (called "The King of Splatter" by Wharton) translates his concern with the eroding, exploding surfaces of his ceramic wall murals to the wall-like surface of a copper plate, and ultimately to paper. In effect, the print is a smaller version of a mural, a print in a literal sense. Using an electronic pencil, Sperry etched away at the plate. He also splattered it with acids and sugar-lift aquatint. The result is an unsettled mixture of slow erosion and quick collapse that undermines a series of geometric, seemingly spartan architectural forms. Entropy overwhelms structure. The print portends a fall, and is weighted by a certain imminence. The specter of the artist eating away at walls, both imagined and actual, as an act of creation is equally portentous.

For years, Richard Shaw has explored the fragile nature of appearances. Associated with the Bay Area Funk movement, an anti-formalist aesthetic of the late sixties, Shaw constructs porcelain sculptures that both support and destabilize the *trompe-l'oeil* effects they carry. Those effects—say, of playing cards on wafer-thin clay, or tin-can labels on ceramic cylinders—are printed on porcelain surfaces and represent the thinnest veneer of identity. With most objects, we assume an intrinsic relationship between shape and surface effect. Shaw refutes this assumption by requiring of the viewer an intellectual distinction between, say, the cylindrical shape of a can and the visual field that surrounds it. This distinction has anthropomorphic overtones, as though skin were being lifted from bone. Perhaps this accounts for the work's surreal anxiety.

In effect, Shaw coats actual objects with virtual appearances. But neither the object nor the appearance is what it seems. A porcelain cylinder is not a can, nor can a label make it so. When Shaw assembles his shapes and images into unsteady stick-figures, or figural piles of, seemingly, books and playing cards, he ups the apparitional ante. The whole thing threatens to be something else, and finally to collapse. Our knowledge of porcelain's fragility heightens that threat. In this sense, the "look" of something, its visual label, is the perceptual glue that holds it together. It is an intellectual emblem that signifies the thing as itself—and yet, it is not that thing, but merely a veneer that can be peeled away at will. Shaw's sculptures are about the fabrication of appearances and the negation of identity.

His silk-screen print embodies these ideas. It appears to include fragments of newspapers and brand label insignias, such as "Lucky Strike," "Fox Head Beer," and "S. T. P.," as well as a postage stamp and an image of a coffee cup. Like Lind's fish platter, Shaw's work spreads out his imagery for the viewer, but as if on a breakfast table. What he serves up, however, are conflicting versions of flatness. Commercial insignias overlap and cancel each other, a field of blue presses, edge to edge, against a grainy brown, a star peeks inside the picture like an orphan. The "Lucky Strike" fragment, torn in two, seems to have slipped on a slippery skin. It suggests misalignment in the printing process. Numerous surface scratches lock appearances into place.

There is something of Jasper Johns here. What kind of space does a label, a letter, or a shadow occupy? Only cognitive space, which we recognize. These signs have identity, but lack substance. They do not occupy cognitive space so much as they visually organize it, maneuvering in and out of what we believe them to be. Even the implied concentricity of Shaw's coffee cup, which is echoed by the shapes of various labels, recalls Johns' use of targets as the emblems of an intellectual terrain. In this sense, Shaw has less to do with the irreverence of Funk than the analytical systems of the late fifties, the well-springs of Pop. The coffee cup, of course, also refers to pottery.

Art is meant and practiced to slow things down. Its rhythms are contemplative, its angles focused. The edges of experience are determined from the inside out, and from one experience to another. Its logic is subjective, and thereby presses against any attempt to contain it. In an age of quick delivery, it requires patience and attention.

It is, in practice, a method by which to see—a method that can be anti-categorical, an open rather than a closed system.

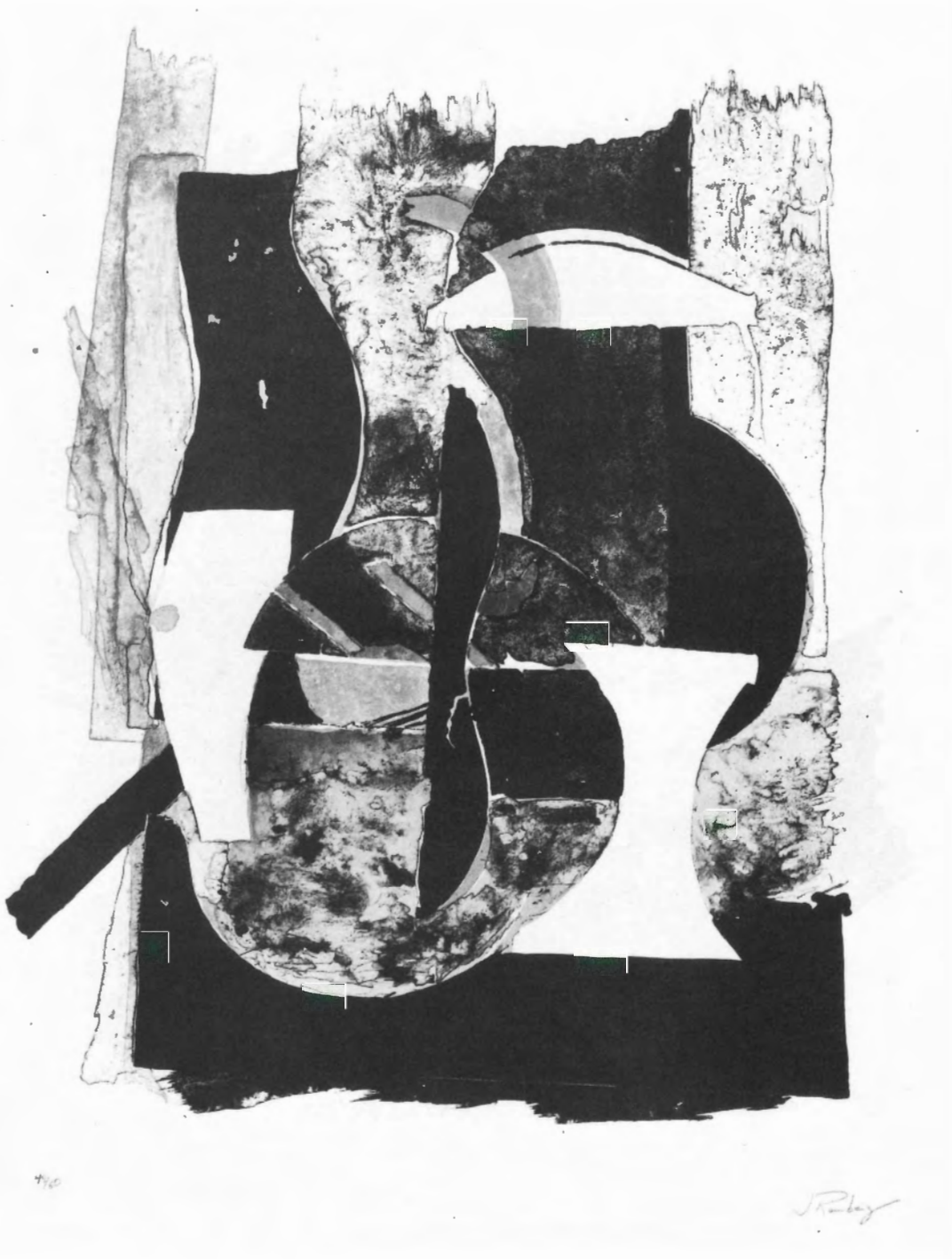
The true variables in that system are the artists, with whom we entrust our cultural vitality. The provision of forums for their interchange, by such places as the Sun Valley Center, is part of that system. A system that, in this case, can finally be reduced to a single method that is unpredictable by design—an exchange between a potter and a printer, two artists.

Jeff Kelley is a critic living in San Diego, California. He writes for the Los Angeles Times, Artforum, *and* Vanguard, *and is contributing editor to* Artweek.

"Potters and Prints" was a collaborative project at the Sun Valley Center for the Arts and Humanities, Idaho, in which six clay artists produced a limited edition portfolio working with the center's master printmaker, David Wharton. An exhibition of these prints opened at Sun Valley last December, then traveled to Salt Lake Art Center, Utah, and Lill Street Gallery, Chicago. Upcoming exhibition sites are: Signet Arts, St. Louis (April 5–May 5); Contemporary Crafts Association, Portland (May 23–June 15); Missoula Museum of the Arts, Montana (June 26–July 27); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (August 22–October 27); and Herret Museum, Twin Falls, Idaho (November 5–December 15).

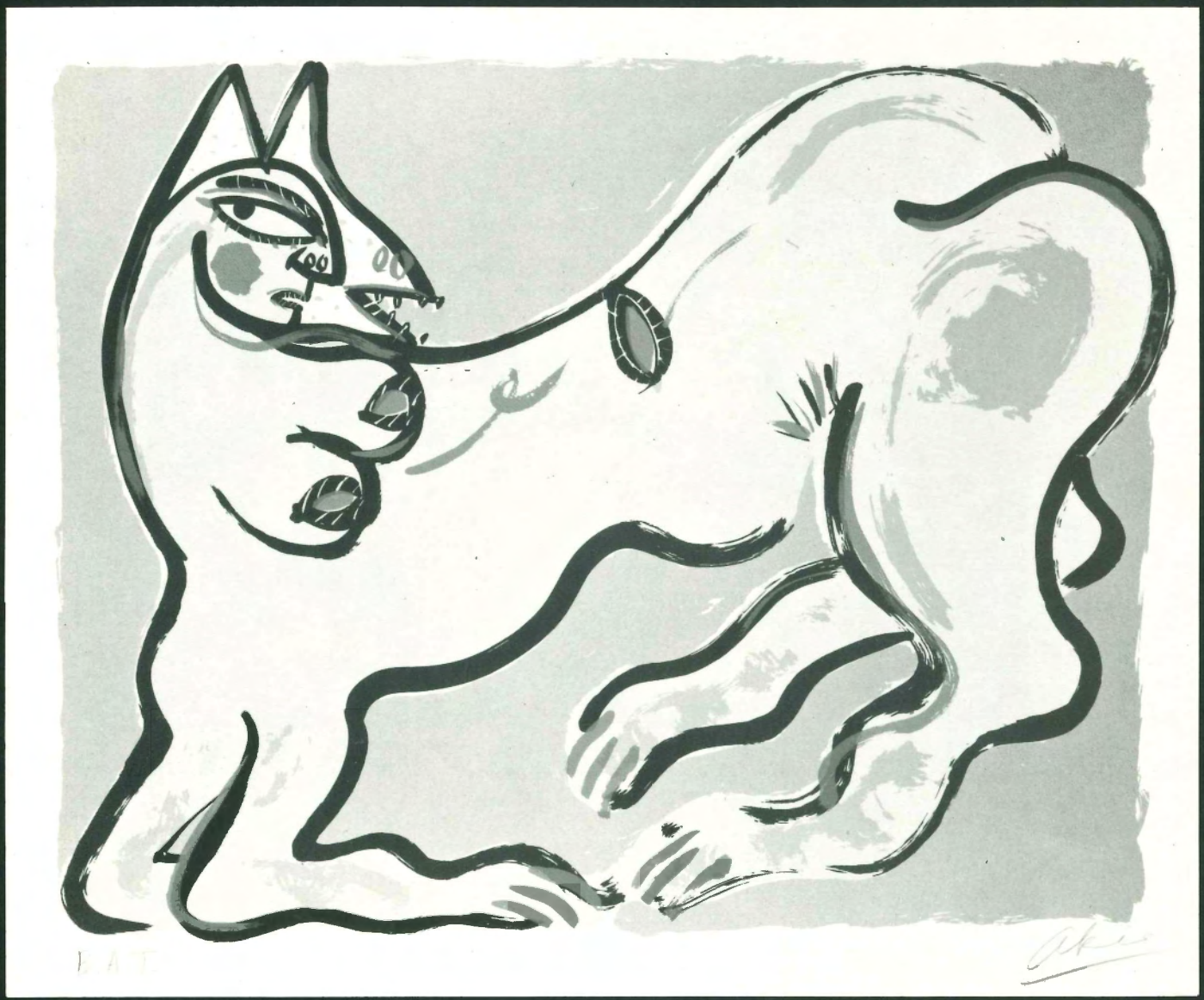
Untitled *by Richard Shaw (1984),*
22" x 27" (55 x 68 cm), screenprint.
Photo: Peter De Lory.

Untitled *by Jim Romberg (1984), 27" x 22" (68 x 55 cm), lithograph. Photo: Peter De Lory.*

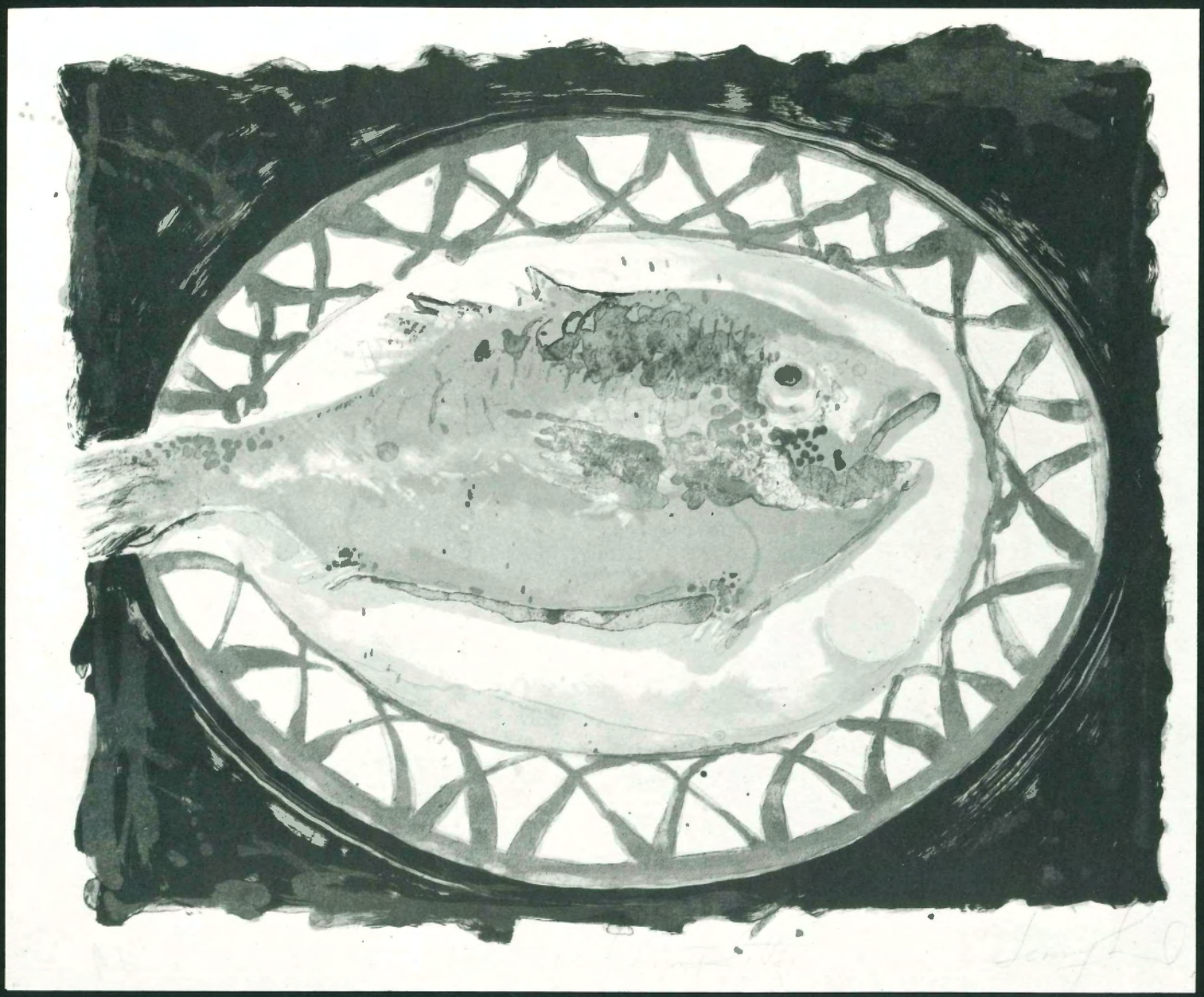


Untitled *by Robert Sperry (1984), 27" x 22" (68 x 55 cm), etching. Photo: Peter De Lory.*

Untitled *by Akio Takamori (1984), 22" x 27" (55 x 68 cm), screenprint. Photo: Peter De Lory.*

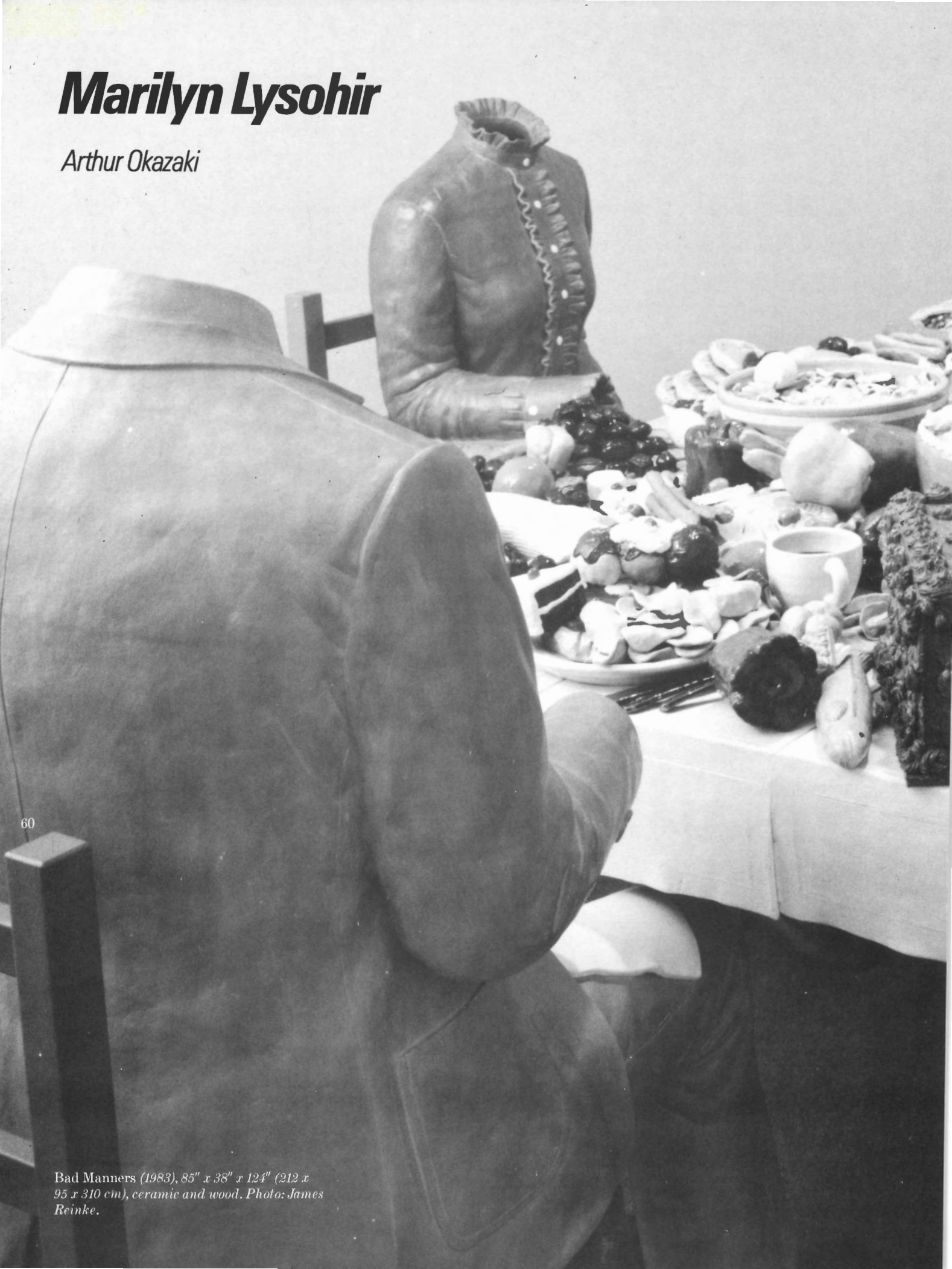


Untitled *by Jenny Lind (1984), 22" x 27" (55 x 68 cm), lithograph. Photo: Peter De Lory.*



Marilyn Lysohir

Arthur Okazaki



Bad Manners *(1983), 85" x 38" x 124" (212 x 95 x 310 cm), ceramic and wood. Photo: James Reinke.*

Large-scale ceramic figures evoke images of bland portrait busts of civic leaders or self-consciously whimsical Pop-Surrealist images. In front of Marilyn Lysohir's pieces, however, our apprehension is not skewed by formidable scale, imitative finesse, or punny prankishness. In her work, terra sigillata surfaces veil the underlying structural amplitude of the figures in a way that belies their actual mass and weight. The environmental settings reinforce this remove from the physical reality of the pieces, and lure us into a diorama-like drama that resonates between intensely personal references, observations of the human condition, and metaphorical implications. These latter intimations steer clear of philosophical platitudes; they are earthbound, pungent allusions, often rooted in fable and descriptive of the triumphs and pitfalls that confront us all.

In Lysohir's work, recurring themes and images emerge: domestic rituals, costumed protagonists, food. These scenarios often grow out of actual experiences, like house-sitting a pampered cat (*Goldilocks Watches TV*, 1978) or feeding ducks at a friend's farm (*Nizza and the Ducks*, 1977). The use of private (though not exclusive) references and altered realities achieves a mix of personal and public statements that fortifies Lysohir's aim of creating pieces that are entertaining, but also imbued with purposive undertones of social consciousness and other humanitarian concerns. For example, in the tableaux depicting the essential purity and serenity of farm life, these bucolic verities are constantly threatened by debasement and violation from internal and external forces (greed, malevolence, injustice).

In a number of other pieces, Lysohir uses repeated images. Like Muybridge's sequential studies of figures in motion, the clay reduplications are sometimes suggestive of cinematic narrative and elicit a feeling of depersonalized presences. They are not portraits. Rather, they share intimations of generality and universality. Though the figures, when repeated, are often about the same size, *Maiden America* (1978) presents a variation. In this case, a paraphrase of the Venus de Milo sports arms and an Indian headdress, a fanciful image done in classical cigar store style. It summons forth Benjamin West's awed comment upon viewing the Apollo Belvedere: "How like a Mowhawk warrior." The maiden is represented three times: as a large-scale, monochromatic, terra-sigillata figure, while on her hand stands a small, low-fire, underglaze figurine in whose hand, in turn, is yet a smaller monochromatic maiden. Repetition, for Lysohir, suggests a kind of temporal perspective: the passage of space and time. This is enhanced by the shrinking figurines and the implication of perspective: the diminution of forms with increasing distance. These traditional pictorial concerns play against the combination of historical and social references. The surface treatment and massing of Lysohir's figures impart a strong and effective sense of monumentality to the grouping, augmenting its presence and intensifying its metaphorical suggestiveness. The pieces are familiar and accessible, but also demand scrutiny and reflection. The ample rewards are visual and intellectual.

In another piece with repeated figures, a forest of military uniforms is at first sight, to use military/political jargon, "off-putting." On a section of tiled floor, eleven figures, six standing and five sitting, command their space with iconic solemnity and drill-team precision. On the laps of the seated figures perch small battle scenes, with soldiers camouflaged to blend in with the large figures. In a world filled with threatening martial acronyms, *B. A. M.s* is an agreeable diversion—the impish nickname for the Women's Marine Coprs during World War II: Big-Assed Marines. Lysohir's mother was a B. A. M. sergeant. The family portrait remains imbedded in the grouping, but its individuality becomes obscured by the anonymous authority of the collective assembly of woman marines. Each figure harbors particularized details: different hair color, dissimilar rank, or a purse turned differently.

The expressive core of the piece springs from the unrelenting presence of the hierarchic figures and their silent sovereignty. This aspect of the piece goes back to Lysohir's absorption with the monumental Ch'in dynasty equestrian and figural works unearthed in the mid-1970s. Discovered by peasants digging a well in the Yellow River Valley, the heart of Chinese civilization, excavations up to now have revealed over six thousand terra-cotta figures. Armed soldiers (with real weapons), servants, horses and chariots—all life-size, and depicting distinctive individuals—were part of the funerary entourage guarding the tomb of China's first emperor, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti (221–210 B. C.), best known for his initiation of the construction of the Great Wall.

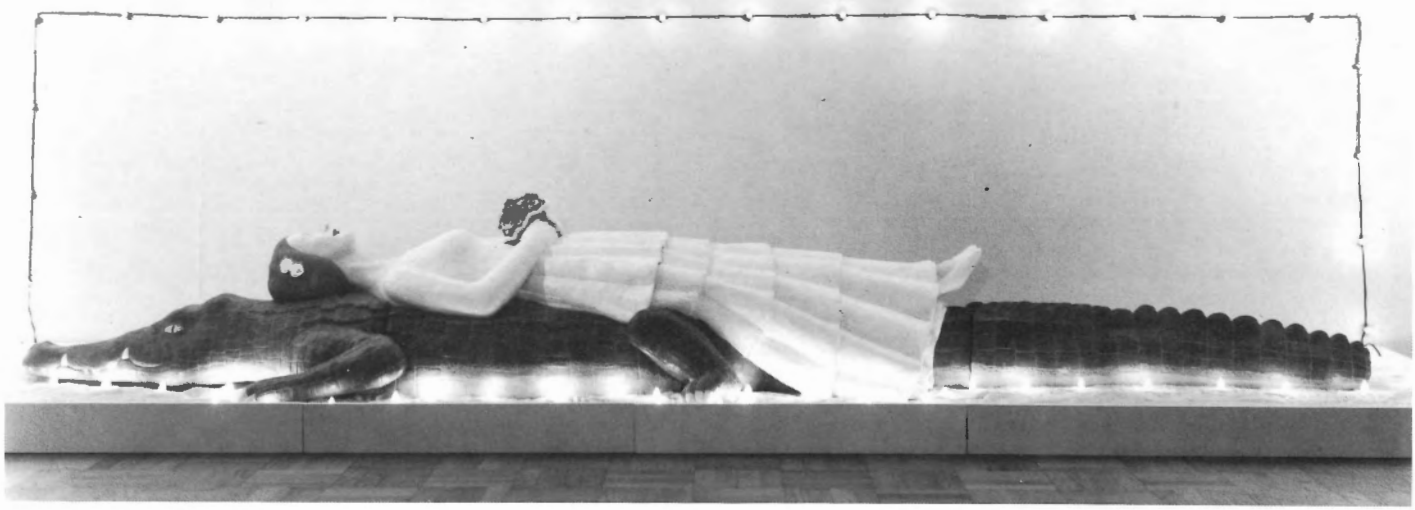
The sources for *B. A. M.s* thus reach deeply into personal, cultural, and military histories. The vignettes of battles on the *B. A. M.s* laps establish an additional reference: a female-mythological connection with a mother's sheltering gesture, and the feminine personages of Norse mythology, with their martial and fatalistic aspects—the Valkyries, presiding over battles and accompanying heroic spirits to Valhalla; and the Norns, who determined the destiny of all.

The eclectic references in *B. A. M.s* come out of a similar diversity of interests and experiences on the part of Lysohir and her husband Ross, also an artist. They collect artifacts and information about preliterate art and folk art, ranging from the masks of cultures all over the world to the work of Ulysses Davis, a barber and woodcarver from Georgia, best known for his ensemble of bust portraits of forty American Presidents.[1] This sensitivity to highly personal and regional expression was adumbrated in Lysohir's early influences from Midwest ceramists Bruce Chesser (a

(Detail) Bad Manners *(1983). Photo: Arthur Okazaki.*

The Alligator's Wife *(1981–82), 15' (4.5 m) long, clay, rice, lights. Photo: Mike Short.*

1983



part-Seminole Indian who was teaching at Lysohir's undergraduate school), and Chick Mangus (whose wife Nizza was Lysohir's high school art teacher). Only after moving West was she exposed to Bay Area funk ceramics, which she assimilated more as a historical overlay on top of her original training as a painter schooled in Bauhaus theory; the stylistic impact of West Coast art has been minimal.

Lysohir's almost exclusive use of female imagery might suggest feminist leanings. This intimation was explored by Patricia Watkinson, curator of the Washington State University Museum of Art, who queried Lysohir about this apparent political slant. The reply: "I don't want to be classed as a feminist artist or to have the meaning of my work limited to just that. I love the figure. But I use the female figure because I'm most comfortable with it. One way or another all the works look a bit like me."

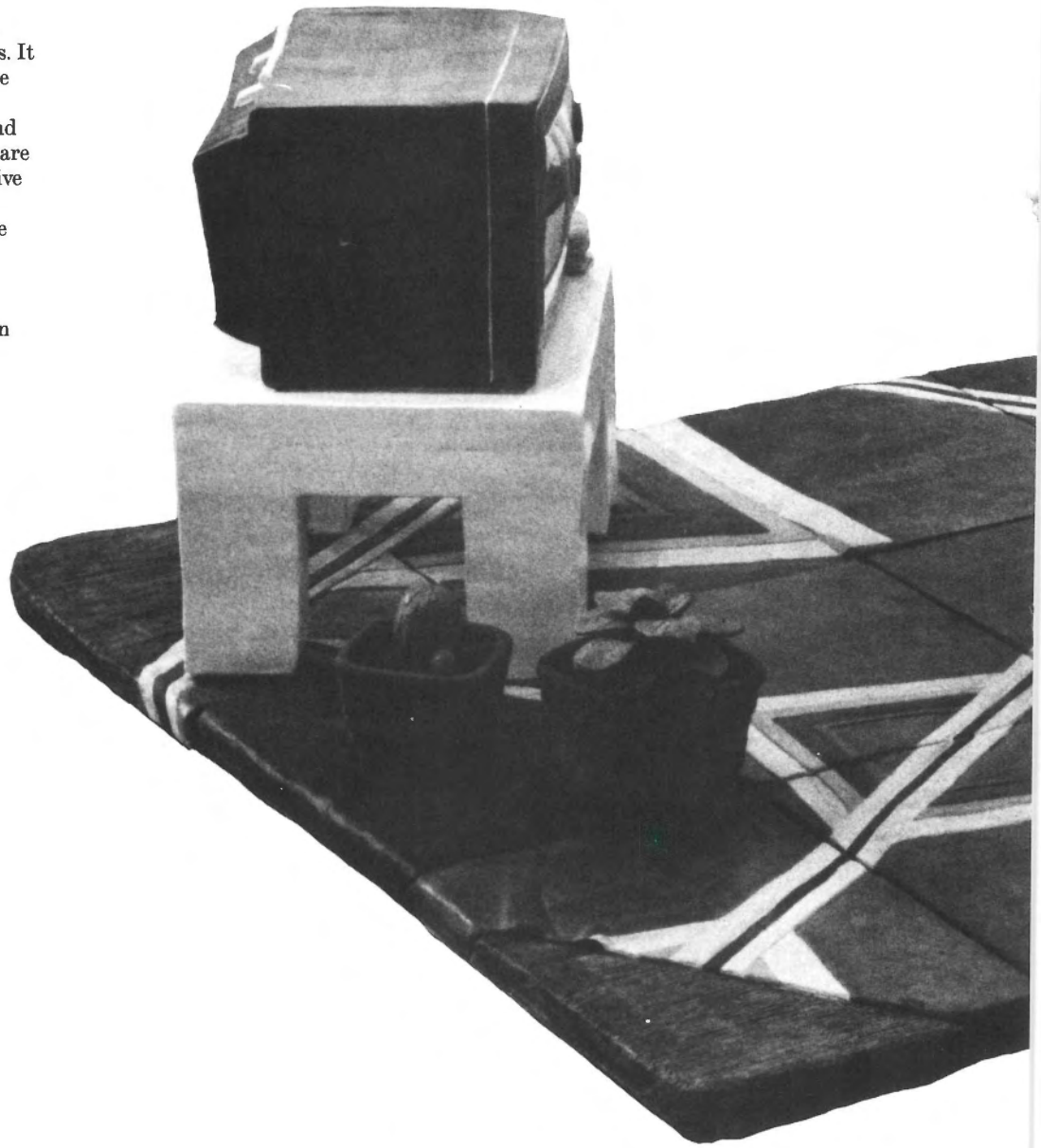
These comments are amplified by a series of works dealing with marriage. The *Fourth Sister* (1981) commemorates Lysohir's four aunts who never married and, by extension, alludes to the pressures put on people to do things that are expected of them by a demanding and sometimes duplicitous society. The almost identical figures bend tentatively in front of similar tiered cakes. It is evident that mouth-sized chunks of cake have been indelicately bitten off the top layer, but details such as fallen crumbs and residual icing around the brides' mouths are not present. By suppressing these narrative particulars, the piece becomes less the illustration of a specific episode, and more of a parable on society's expectations about marriage.

The narrative essence of the scene—a wedding-cake eating contest—emerged in another form as a performance piece by Lysohir, which in turn was videotaped. Thus the activity exists as a static clay ensemble, a fugitive theatrical event, and as a video documentary.

The same sacrament underscores *Alligator's Wife* (1981), which was started shortly before Lysohir's own marriage. An alligator supports a recumbent bride who lies face up along its lumpy dorsal surface. This subject too has antecedents in her personal history: a photographic postcard sent during World War II by Lysohir's father to her future mother, in which a figure (her father-to-be) holds a stuffed alligator. The anecdotal reference is, however, overshadowed by allegorical implications: marriage being a passage into the next step of life, and the accompanying fears of both man and woman as they confront this event.

The female-animal apposition conjures up visions ranging from the peccadillos of the amorous Zeus, who, in the guise of a white bull, seduced Europa, to the gripping advances of King Kong. The lengthy reptile (fourteen feet long) is actually quite benign, though. The animal is a buffer (or is it an intercessor?) between the bride and the marriage ritual, suggested by the bed of rice and the wreath of lights that provide an incantatory touch. An unanticipated byproduct of the piece was olfactory: heat from the enframing flamelike bulbs started to actually cook the granules, supplementing the visual impact with a pungent addition—somewhat like the smell of censers at the front of an altar.

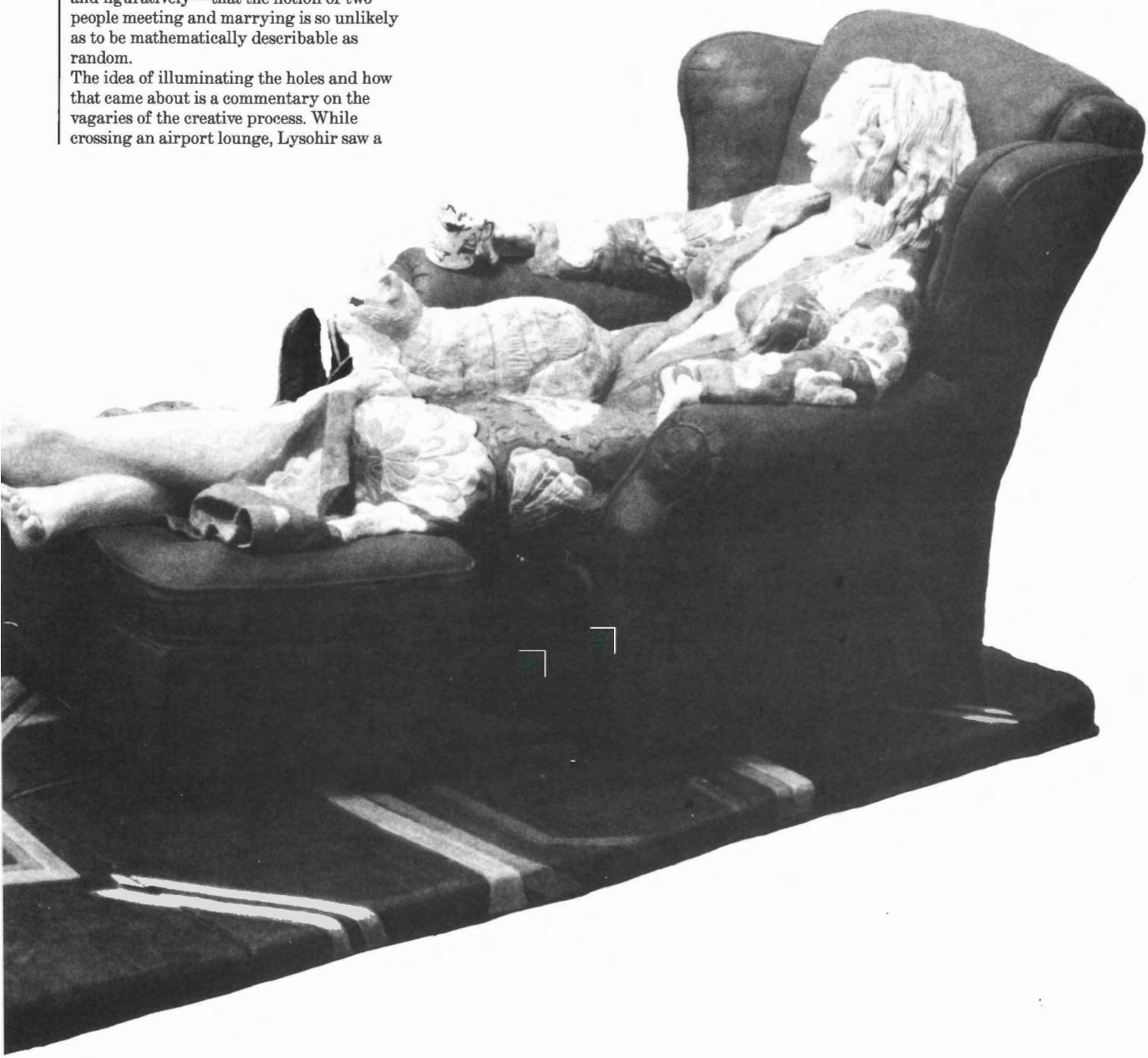
Lysohir's inclination to use iconic, multifigured scenes has roots in her Ukrainian heritage, especially the orthodox religious settings that were dazzling and spatially intriguing with their dramatic lighting and vivid narrative scenarios. For her, the church was a vessel of visual entertainment at an early age, and it also impressed upon her the significance and beauty of rituals, a recurring theme in Lysohir's art.

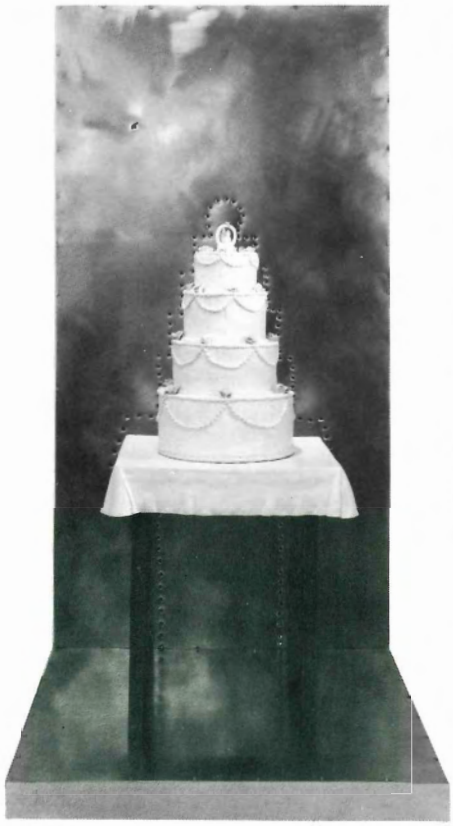


A material aspect of Lysohir's work is her increasing use of a variety of mediums. Ceramic elements unquestionably dominate, but there is the peripheral encroachment of wood, metal, plastic, and artificial light. These nonclay constituents are sometimes merely supportive, (a table, for example), but they can also work symbolically, as we have seen with the string of lights. In *Random Shot* (1982), a ceramic wedding cake and table cloth rests on an aluminum-legged table in front of a metal backdrop that has been perforated by holes outlining the tiered cake shape. Created by twenty-two caliber bullets, the grouped holes and the single skewed one allude to the title both literally and figuratively—that the notion of two people meeting and marrying is so unlikely as to be mathematically describable as random.

The idea of illuminating the holes and how that came about is a commentary on the vagaries of the creative process. While crossing an airport lounge, Lysohir saw a

Goldilocks Watches TV *(1978), 25" x 40" x 62" (63 x 100 x 155 cm), clay, terra sigillata. Collection Ed and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, Hope, Idaho. Photo: Ross Coates*





The Random Shot *(1982), 87" x 40" x 6" (218 x 100 x 15 cm), clay, aluminum, lights. Photo: Mike Short.*

B.A.M.s *(1980), 46" x 48" x 142" (115 x 120 x 355 cm), clay. Photo: Ed Marquand.*

phone booth and was attracted to the pattern of lights caused by lettering that had been stamped out of the booth. Retrieving and employing this device in the context of the bullet-hole portrait of the cake is one of those inexplicable but fortuitous intersections of memory and creative expediency. The connection between the wedding cake and the punched-hole decorative patterns of tin-walled early American pie safes is another happy correspondence.

Food fixation is the focus of *Bed and Board* (1978) and the more recent *Bad Manners* (1983). The earlier piece has elements common to many of Lysohir's works: personal reminiscence (Lysohir's bed and cover) overlayed by metaphorical implications. In this case, memories of the harvest bounty are transformed into a playful visualization of greed and overindulgence. The polychromed pile of food in contrast to the white of both the chenille bedspread and bedframe evoke a dreamlike image of nutritional excess.

The culminating piece in the food-oriented series is *Bad Manners*, an expansive restatement of the greed theme that includes four life-size seated figures, and a six-foot-long table encumbered with an astonishingly diverse and jarring variety of food. Almost one year in the making, *Bad Manners* embodies the spectrum of approaches and techniques that Lysohir employs.

Everything is handbuilt of coil or slabs; no molds are used. Owing to the size of the figures and the size of the available kiln, the coats and shirts of the figures were constructed so that they could be lifted off (to facilitate carrying and moving), but they were fired together.

Terra sigillata forms the outer surface of the figures. The lightest and finest powdery elements of ball clay, skimmed off the top of a water-separation process, are mixed with stain and painted on the sculpted surface in four successive layers. The last layer is burnished to provide the characteristic surface of this technique: a smooth, matte finish that has a warm, aged appearance. On the patterned dress, the leaves and flowers were carved into the surface in low relief, imparting a subtle texture that plays off against the burnished finish.

The tablecloth is fabricated from twenty-four closely-fit ceramic pieces resting on a wooden table. Amidst the chaos of the piled and scattered food are several foci: the centerpiece, the larger food items (turkey, signature cake), and the place settings. All the foodstuff is glazed with vivid low-fire commercial underglazes, imparting a lustrous, chromatic exuberance that resonates with the extravagant heap of nutriment. Edibles of every description overlay the tablecloth tiles: fruit, vegetables, cakes, cookies, fish, joints of meat, ham, hot dogs, hamburgers, pizza, and even sushi. Filling the interstices are chocolates, caloric vestiges from Lysohir's employment during high school at Daffin's Candies in Sharon, Pennsylvania. One of the largest candy manufacturers in the country, Daffin's is most fondly remembered for "Chocolatetown, U. S. A.," an Easter-time chocolate extravaganza where Lysohir once worked on a four-foot rabbit that ended up being double that size, sculpted in the additive technique that would later produce life-size ceramic figures.

Bad Manners was exhibited last year at Asher-Faure, Lysohir's first exhibition in Los Angeles. Purchased, it now fittingly resides in the collector's dining room. The preoccupation with food elicits visions of food in art: seventeenth-century Dutch still-lifes of tables laden with victuals, Brueghel's lusty peasants at wedding feasts, oysters by Manet, Chardin's austere edibles, the marginalia of medieval manuscripts, nineteenth-century botanica engravings, restaurant interiors and façades by twentieth-century photorealists. The list could go on, but the point might be missed. In a statement about the piece, Lysohir's thoughts go beyond the immediate reality of conspicuous consumption and the current trendy mania for gastro-chic ("Should we go Szechuan or Cajun tonight, dear?"). She reflects on how "*Bad Manners* is about revenge and the accumulation of securities for the insecure"; how it "is about world hunger being ignored while world armaments aren't." Putting her money where her mouth is, Lysohir has donated five percent of the selling price to the Hunger Project, which is concerned with how surplus food is distributed to allay starvation and malnourishment, and with educating people about the realities of widespread, chronic hunger and ways to deal with it. In a very real way, this act—a political and compassionate deed—and the creative sequence that preceded it, is a synopsis of Lysohir and her work. An awareness of the past filtered through an individual sensibility, conceived in visual form, fabricated with understated skill into life-size ceramic tableaux—this object-oriented formative progression provokes metaphorical and allegorical thoughts, but never loses grip of the real world where it all began.

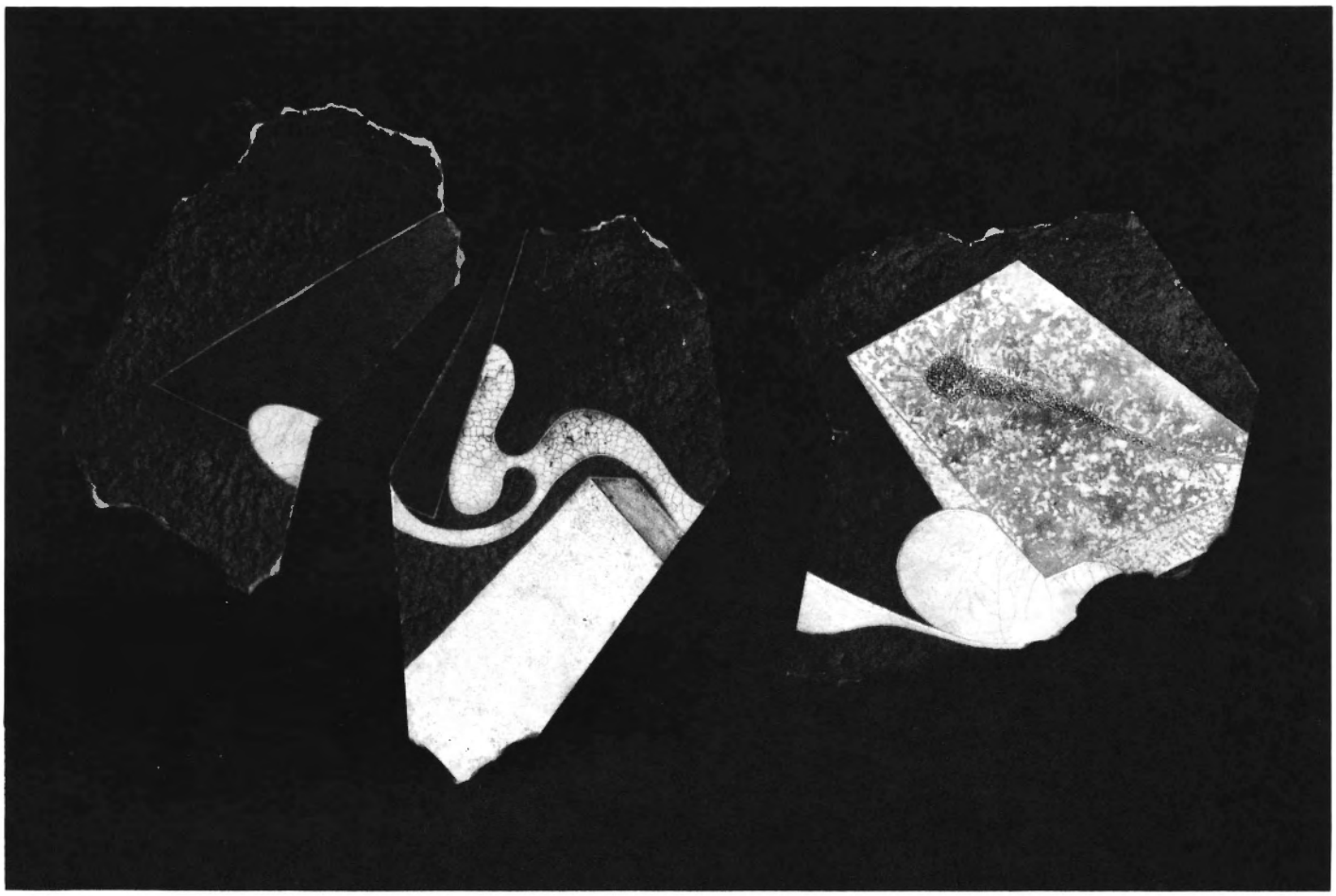
1. Jane Livingston, John Beardsley, and Reginia Perry, *Black Folk Art in America 1930–1980*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983).

Marilyn Lysohir's work was the subject of a solo exhibition at Asher/Faure, Los Angeles, in 1984.

Arthur Okazaki is a professor of photography and art history at Washington State University, Pullman.

Exhibitions

Bold Press *(1984), 74" (185 cm) long. Photo: Jim Burke.*



Michael Gustavson

Susan Zwinger

Michael Gustavson's thinly-drawn fifty-pound vessels have always been a ceramic manifestation of biological growth, expanding universal forces, jazz dance, or simply the movement of mud down a hillside. Yet when the artist's son was born last year, something inexplicable unfolded. Gustavson's forms became the exterior manifestation of that most ancient process, reflecting the intimacy, mystery, and even fearfulness of this biological dance.

Technically, the idea is straightforward. Throwing a large container from thirty to fifty pounds of clay, Gustavson then begins drawing the form up and out between two ribs of wood. Through hundreds of "draws," the pedantic wheel shape acquiesces to the slowly evolving organism that seems to emerge from the implicit laws of the clay itself. Resultant forms lean, sway, gulp, writhe, and gape upward or even at seemingly precarious angles to the horizontal in biomorphic gestures reminiscent of marine forms. A thick waffle of lip is left at the end of the draw, finishing the open mouth in a declarative, amorphous expression. After the bisque firing, wax lines are applied in either organic, Miró-like or strict, geometric forms—the two struggling back and forth, then intermingling. He and his wife, Dee, coworker in two different creative processes, thickly apply commercial glazes in nonconventional manners and strange textural juxtapositions: a high-gloss pink against an overly thick raw black lava, for instance. The resultant contrasts are jarring, but held together by forms and curving surfaces of the piece.

As these were so painterly, Gustavson moved from huge vessels to flat raku surfaces mounted on the wall. These often function as plates on an armored animal, such as a trilobite, or as map fragments in which the image continues from one to the next. Leaps of image effectively play with our mind's capacity to fuse information and adapt to visual ellipses. He has named them with particular care, as one would name small beings going out into the world with their own identity: *Juggler's Dance, Primal Oval, Blue Stone Viewer*, and *Jazz Dancer*. They seem to consist of eggs, embryos, limbs, digits, constellations—all vaguely figurative, yet all nebulous enough to slip out from any recognizable tag.

More recently, he has continued to develop the growth forms: from stress and stretch marks in the actual raku clay body, to fleshy interaction of image and pot bulge. They capture fluidity more so than ever, and one has the impression that taking one home would not stop its evolving shape—that one might enter the room to find it reaching for new heights, bending or twisting or opening wider its mouth in some sort of invisible, primordial scream.

Michael Gustavson exhibited in 1984 at Running Ridge Gallery, Santa Fe; at A.R.T./Beasley, San Diego; and at Elaine Potter Gallery, San Francisco.

Susan Zwinger is an artist and a writer for Artlines, Artspace, Artweek, Craft Range, *and the* Santa Fe Reporter.

Anne Perrigo

Matthew Kangas

There has never been a cult of the ceramic object, *per se,* in the Pacific Northwest. Clay has always been shown combined with or alongside other media, and most usually transformed into a sculptural form. Howard Kottler and Patti Warashina have worked this way for years and their best student in some time, Anne Perrigo, had an especially auspicious solo début earlier last year.

The half-dozen or so sculptures are really more assemblage than ceramics, though clay remains the dominant element. Hers is an art with many allusions to both the history of clay knickknacks and to the personification of women and children within the cluttered legacy of consumer advertising and the history of art. She seems to use junk shops the way some artists use a palette, and the slammed-together appearance of the busts brings a refreshing spontaneity to the genre of ceramic sculpture, which was in danger of being overplanned and overplayed.

Perrigo makes figurative sculpture that seems on the edge of exploding from within, or of collapsing or toppling from its own piled-up weight. The elements all have a symbolic character of their own and Perrigo's growing ability at pushing things to their material or conceptual limit again distinguishes her from other practitioners around the nation. These are not rugged cartoons or caricatured women. They start from realistic heads, which are called upon to support enormous burdens of books, flowerpots, or chickenwire. They seem battered or bruised beings, still able to manage a frail smile.

Working in a medium where animal imagery has often been the rage, Perrigo manages to impart an animallike quality to her women. They seem to alternately cower and snarl; their facial expressions recall the way pets look when dressed up in silly clothing by children.

Just as kids are trying to transform Fido or Pussy into images of themselves or Mommy and Daddy, so Perrigo works from an unconscious blind impulse. This is a key to the expressionistic power of her art. The busts seem like chunks of misplaced humanity set in absurd situations, without entirely being aware of their plight. She gets them perilously close to lovability, but stops short; by using an elaborate material treatment, she heightens the distance and allows viewers to step back, observe these women caught in the traps of Hawaiian junk jewelry, plastic floral bouquets, and cheap novels.

In *Modern Voo Doo* (1984), a smiling black woman seems to dominate a supine white woman. Both look like they've been smashed up and put back together again; both appear locked into a personal and private (possibly sexual) event; both have flesh that gleams with different colors: the black woman bears splotches of white glaze; the white woman has a bruised, black eye.

Betty's Sad/Betty's Glad (1982) is a take-off on the popular Midol ad for menstrual cramp relief. Again, the two figures take on almost opposite qualities. Sad Betty has an empty chickenwire hat bound by a chain; Glad Betty is smiling blandly. There's a huge "bouquet" of plastic flowers on her head and the fragment of a hand touching her shoulder.

Perrigo's ability to impart a monumental weight to pedestal-size busts has much to do with her dazzling virtuosity over glazes and her placement of found objects. It gives her women an affecting, fractured dignity that saves them from satire, sentimentality, lovability, or ridicule. This is important because female figuration in an expressionistic mode has badly lagged behind male figuration, both in numbers and in skill of execution. Lately, other clay artists such as Ann Gardner and Judy Moonelis have neutralized gender in their figures and the place of women artists using female figuration within the Neoexpressionist mode has therefore been weakened. Perrigo is helping to restore that position.

The stunning visual impact of Anne Perrigo's first show must be seen in this light and the great promise it raises as she matures will undoubtedly bring the Seattle artist (and recent Kohler fellow) into a position of greater importance and interest. As it stands, the balance between violence and tenderness, *kitsch* and the aesthetic object, ceramic art and found junk, captures the issues upon which future discussion of her work may be based.

The sculptures of Anne Perrigo were exhibited at the Jackson Street Gallery, Seattle, and The Art Gym, Marylhurst, Oregon.
Matthew Kangas writes for Art in America, Vanguard, *and other art magazines. He is a free-lance critic and curator living in Seattle. Last year, he was named to the art critics advisory panel seminar of the National Endowment for the Arts.*

Betty's Sad/Betty's Glad *(1982), 30" (75 cm) high, clay, chain, chicken wire, plastic flowers. Photo: Roger Schreiber.*

Woven Wings *(1984), 29" (73 cm) long, terra cotta. Courtesy Bess Cutler Gallery, New York. Photo: Pelka/Noble.*

Bardo's Vest *(1984), 22" (55 cm) long, terra cotta. Courtesy Bess Cutler Gallery, New York. Photo: Pelka/Noble.*

Arlene Shechet

Wendy Dubin

Arlene Shechet's ceramic sculptures simultaneously refer to figurative fragments (such as a pelvis or torso), cultural artifacts (masks, arrow quivers), and natural forms (fossils, snails, and bones, for example). The combination of such multiple images produces works that are overwhelmingly enigmatic. And as fired clay itself is a medium that documents process and change, appropriately enough clay sculptures emphasize this quality—to the point where metamorphosis becomes their subject.

Hung like trophies on the gallery walls, the works are as much about painting as they are about sculpture. Surfaces are activated by a dynamic application of color and a vigorous demarcation of texture. For example, a shimmer of glossy glaze contrasts with a matte finish beneath or beside it. Color concentrated in specific areas generates a play of light on the surface, suggesting sources of illumination either internal or external and further defining the curving shapes. Linear grooves carve concentric circles. Radiating dashes gouge across planar expanses. Tension cracks stretch into deep crevices. These lacerations and fissures heighten the surface energy, keeping one's eye moving across, around, and into each work.

These activated surfaces exaggerate the shifting forms that comprise the pieces. Together they create overlapping strata reminiscent of geological formations. The markings punctuate and pattern the surface, interacting with the shifting forms through their wrapping and overlapping. The illusion is twofold: We sense both containment and breakthrough. In *Bardo Vest*, for example, two brick-red trapezoidal slabs form a V-shape and seem to be both girdling and exposing the rusty, striated, skeletal torso beneath.

Colors look scrubbed into the clay surfaces, first saturating and then building up layers of pigment so dense in places that it cracks apart, divulging the underlying hues. Combined with the activity generated by the undulating forms and textural punctuation, this build-up further energizes the surfaces.

The cracked, cracking, or stretched surfaces in some works suggest violent activity brewing deep within; some even appear on the verge of splitting open to emit new entities being formed there. The ambiguous movement back and forth between images, the sense of one form becoming or existing simultaneously as another, alludes to the transformations and changes occurring continuously in nature and in our lives—forms and images in constant flux. In a piece such as *Star Point*, what at one moment appears to be plant or insect life at the next moment suggests a painted tribal mask or the armor of an ancient warrior. When linear patterns are overlapped by broad flat slabs, as in *Folded Wings*, they generate a sense of constraint and restriction, as if the great pink and yellow wings of some giant moth or locust had been bound or pinned down. In *Janus*, lavender-trimmed and salmon-blushed slabs patterned with black slashes overlap one another and the bulging core beneath, thereby creating the illusion of a skin stretched over a mass of moving organs, of a live energy being repressed by an external shield.

When first viewing Shechet's sculptures last year at Bess Cutler Gallery, drawings by Joyce Loughran were exhibited side by side that so related pictorially, they might have been illustrations or models for the ceramic objects, or vice versa. The trophylike sculptures together with the diagrammatic drawings formed a curious display, and raised the issue of context: What *are* these objects hanging on gallery walls like some exotic artifacts, and how are we to relate to them? Shechet probes not only the essence of the objects we find, create, and collect, and with which we surround ourselves, but how their manner of display transforms the meaning of the objects themselves. She challenges our limited vocabularies, the narrow range of definitions through which we have come to confine our vision, and our means for describing art.

Arlene Shechet has shown at Bess Cutler Gallery, New York, and is also represented by Maria Friedrich. She teaches at Parsons School of Design and will be included in an exhibition of distinguished alumni at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum this fall.
Wendy Dubin is a potter living in New York.

Debra Sherwood

Matthew Kangas

The experience of seeing roadside shrines and religious fetish objects during the year of 1983 that Debra Sherwood traveled in Brazil appears to have had an overwhelming influence on the sculptures of this thirty-year-old artist. There is a mix of allusions to folk art weather vanes, dolls, and human and animal forms that may one day coalesce into a clear statement, but which at this point threatens to steep her work in confusion.

Sherwood makes six-foot-high segmented clay statues that are heavily ornamental and function more as architectural decoration than as personally expressive art. The self is distanced in her art in favor of the overworked surface and her forms tend to repeat one another: standing women with raised or pointed arms which sometimes become arrows or curlicues or chicken wings. There may be a private mythology lurking here beneath the surface, but thus far Sherwood has been content to concentrate on decorating monumental forms rather than fully integrating surface and form into a wholly convincing sculptural image.

Nevertheless, there is beautiful workmanship in these forbidding female pseudo-deities. The surfaces are gorgeously scratched and painted, and often one admires a skirt or a sleeve on a Sherwood sculpture more than the whole object. Ultimately, this is a failing, and the bulging biceps and broad hips of these powerful ladies recall that hideous mistake at Lincoln Center's New York State Theater—the Elie Nadelman figures in the lobby. Taken on a small scale, like the best of Nadelman's work, they exude charm and power; blown up by Lincoln Kirstein and architect Philip Johnson, their material obesity outstrips any plastic integrity and vitiates their potential power as over-lifescale figurative ceramic sculptures.

So it is with the bulk of Sherwood's art. Though she has exhibited widely for so young an artist, her place in the third or fourth wave of Pacific Northwest sculptural ceramists is not yet secure. Too often, the size of her "pantheon" figures seems a pretext for elaborately drawn and colored surfaces. Too often, they carry a greater collective force in installation rather than individually. Seeing them one by one, there is an echo of children's art that can become cloying and tiring in the extreme. In installations (which Sherwood designs herself in public places), they have the air of a peopled environment. Works like *Gallus, Gallus* typify the human-animal convention, and are not nearly as successful as *Holding Forces*, a 1982 self-portrait that suggests Sherwood has far greater capabilities as a realistic portrait-bust maker than as a monumental expressionist sculptor.

In the meantime, her art appears to be at an impasse. The labor-intensive qualities so common to clay sculpture today seem locked in battle with a yearning for a complex content. Rather than resolving these issues, they seem to neutralize and depersonalize her art.

I am sure that time will provide the basis for both a restructuring of forms into something less repetitive and a reconceptualization of whatever meaning may lie beneath her elegant and colorful scratches.

Debra Sherwood's sculptures were recently shown at the Whatcome Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington; the Surrey Art Centre of British Columbia; and Traver Sutton Gallery in Seattle.

Somatotypes and Fluxes *(1984), tallest 84" (210 cm) high, clay and paint. Courtesy Traver Sutton Gallery, Seattle. Photo: William Thornton.*

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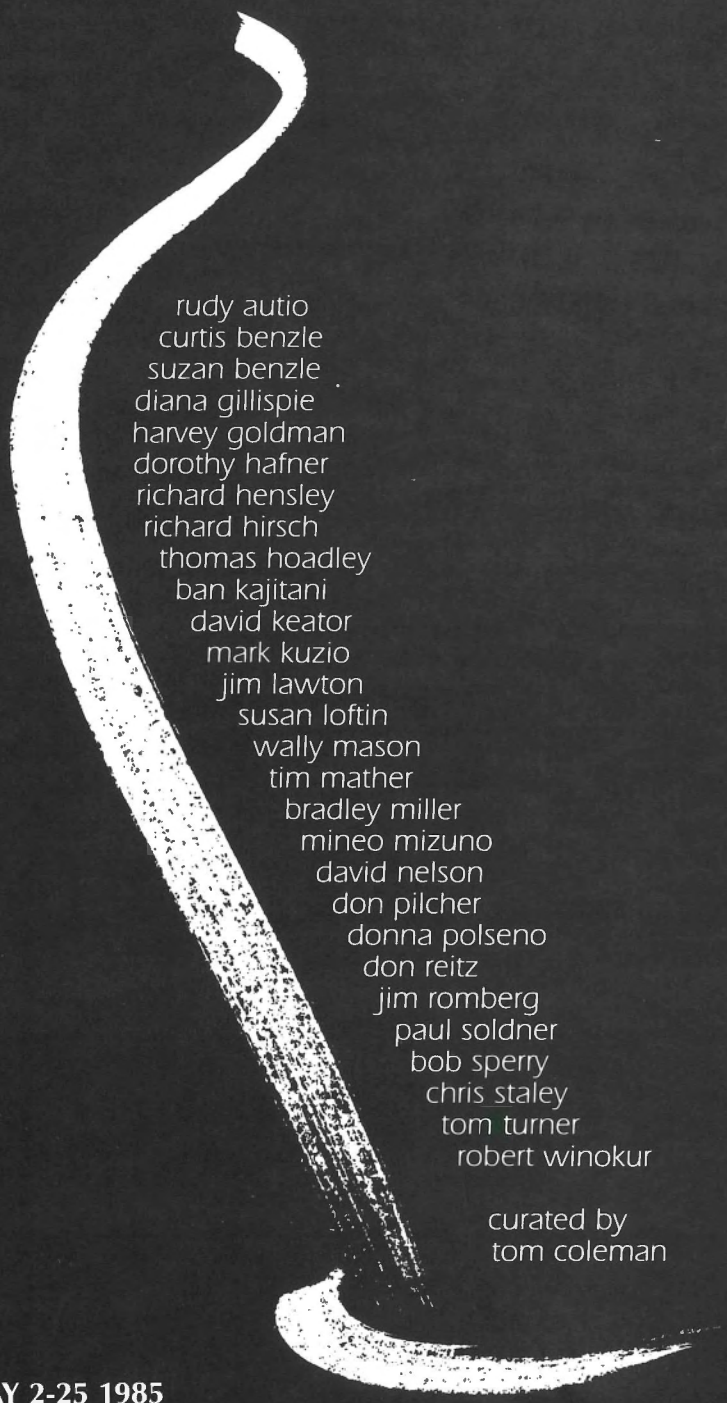

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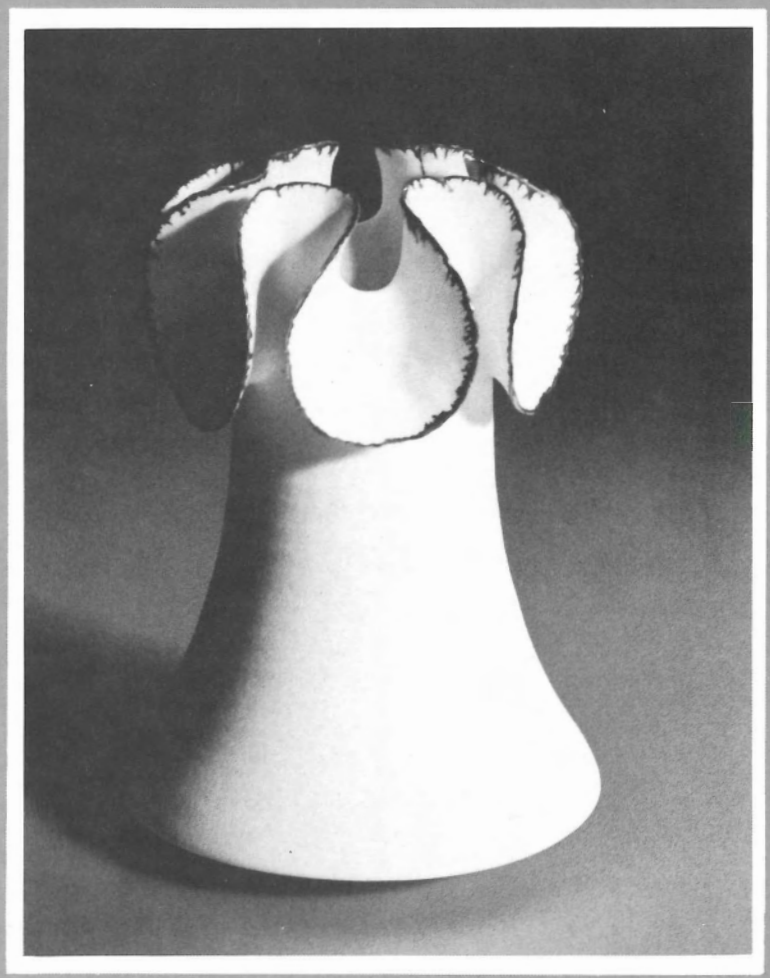

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Photo: George Flemming

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Lenny Dowhie
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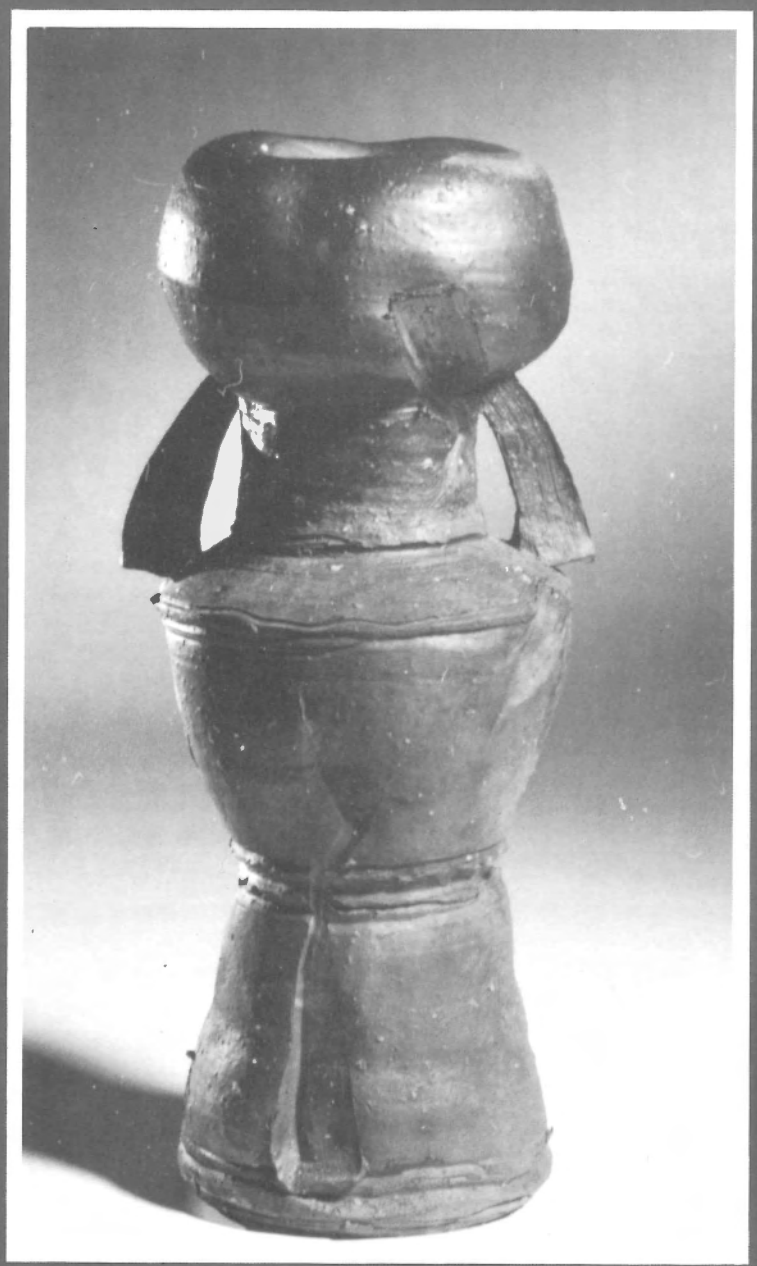

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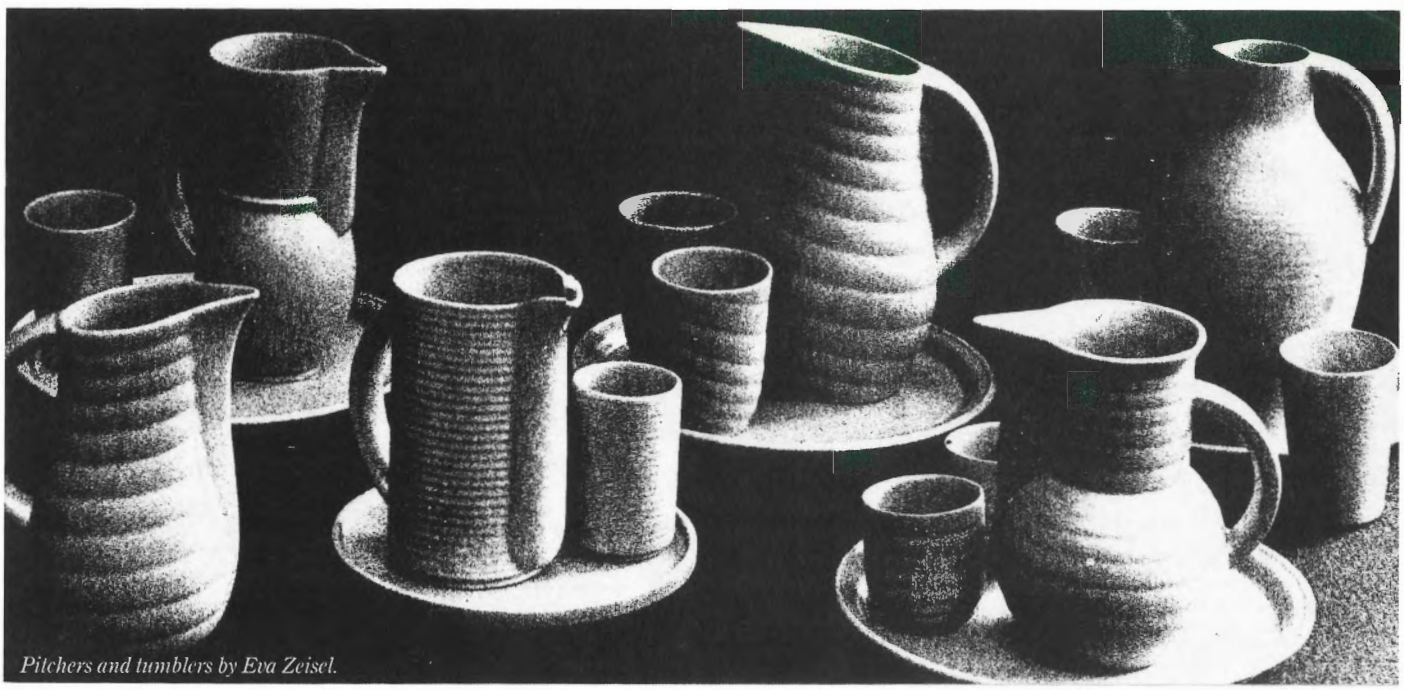

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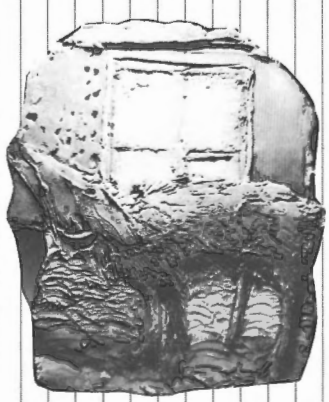

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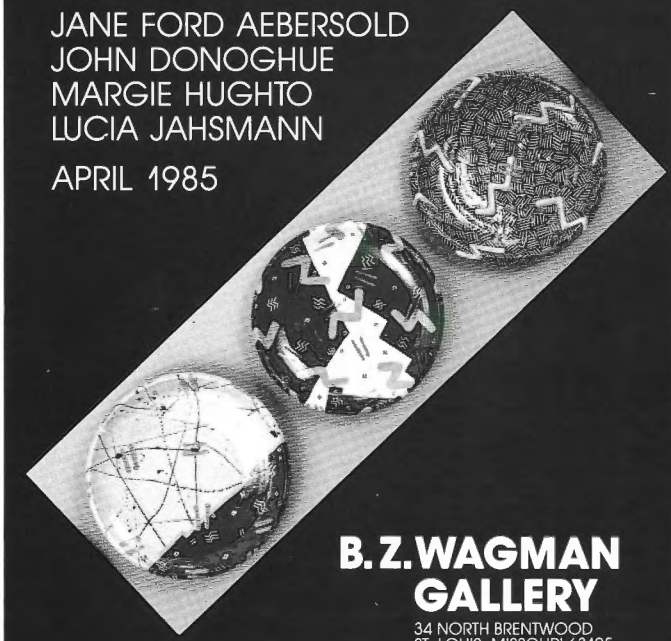

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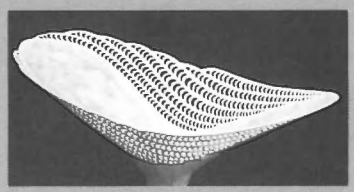

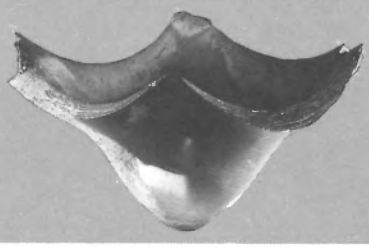

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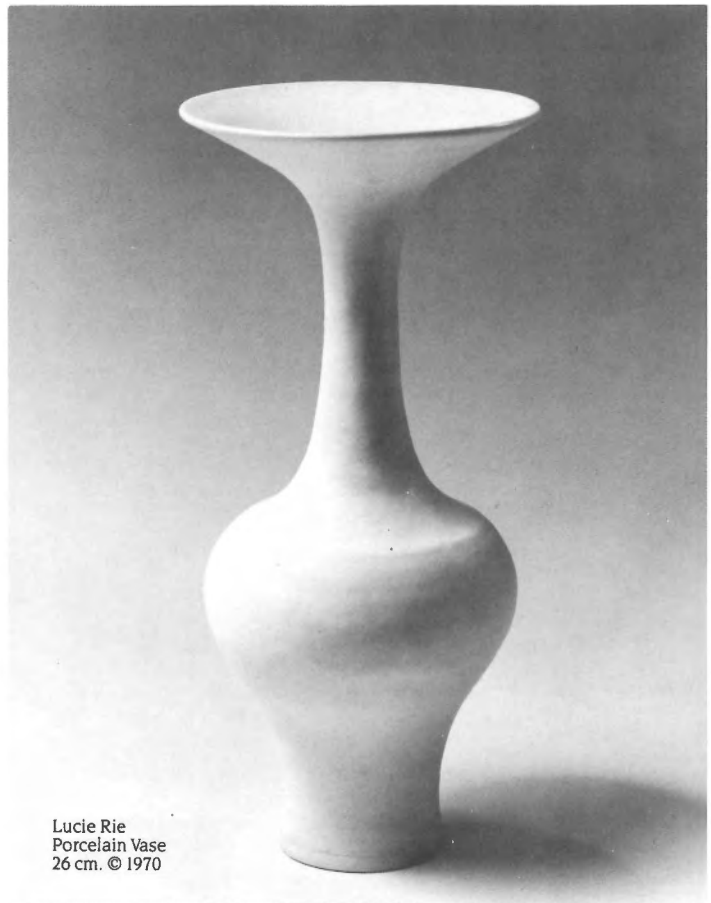

Lucie Rie
Porcelain Vase
26 cm. © 1970

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"Studio Portrait" (1984), clay, 84" x 48" x 21"

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Photo: Brian Vanden Brink

"Burnished Porcelain Vessel" (1985), 11"x11"

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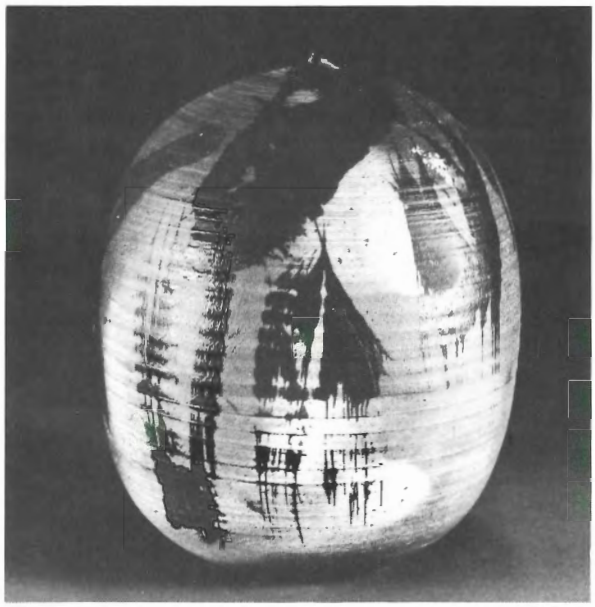
Surface/Function/Shape

Selections from the Earl Millard Collection

March 24–April 12, 1985



Toshiko Takaezu

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville
University Center Gallery

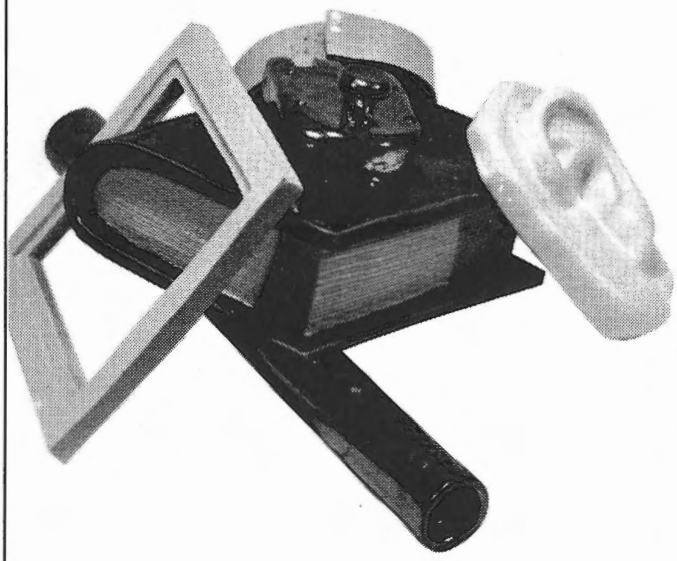
Curated by James Ropiequet Schmidt

Robert Arneson	Ken Ferguson	Phillip Mayberry
Jeri Au	Christine Federighi	Ron Nagle
Rudy Autio	Viola Frey	Jeff Oestreich
Victor Babu	Andrea Gill	Donald Pilcher
Bennett Bean	John Gill	Kenneth Price
Christina Bertoni	John Glick	Ted Randall
Thom Bohnert	Chris Gustin	Daniel Rhodes
Robert Brady	Wayne Higby	Dale Ruff
Wayne Branum	Chuck Hindes	David Shaner
Richard Bresnahan	Clary Illian	Peter Shire
Laurence Buxbaum	Jun Kaneko	Sandy Simon
Tom Coleman	Karen Karnes	Paul Soldner
Philip Cornelius	Eva Kwong	Toshiko Takaezu
Val Cushing	Jim Lawton	Irv Tepper
William Daley	Warren MacKenzie	Robert Turner
Stephen DeStaebler	Jim Makins	Peter Voulkos
Richard DeVore	Kirk Mangus	Betty Woodman
Rick Dillingham	Graham Marks	

Color catalog, designed by Dimitri Levas with an essay by Jeff Perrone, available at a cost of $15 ppd (checks payable to SIUE Foundation—Ceramics Development Fund). Mail to Millard Collection Catalog, Art Department, Box 74, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, Edwardsville, Illinois 62026. The Millard Exhibition coincides with the NCECA Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, April 3–6, 1985. This exhibition is supported in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

Yiannes

March 5–28 1985



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- Hank Murrow
- Harvey Goldman

July 15th through Aug. 2nd
- Ron Dale & Bob James, Visiting Artist

Aug. 12th through Aug. 23rd
- Brad Reed

Aug. 26th through Sept. 13th
- Cynthia Bringle
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Denise Suska-Green
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May 20 – June 20

Richard Lipscher
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June 24 – July 25

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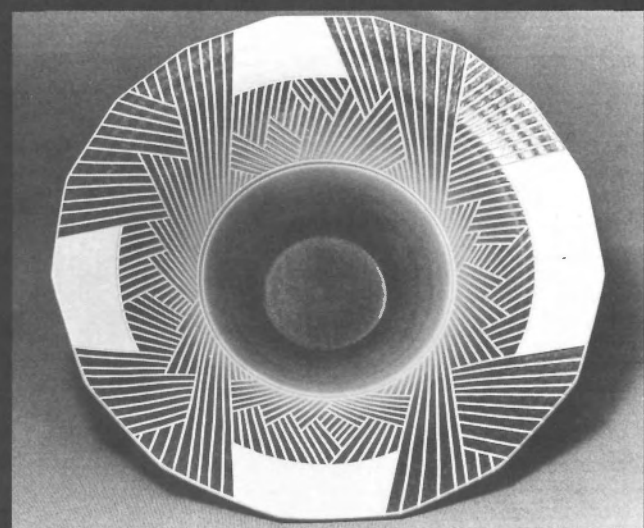

Photo: Wayne Bates

Wayne Bates
Richard Reinhardt
April 10-30
Artist's Reception: April 12, 4-7pm

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July 29-August 2

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August 12-16

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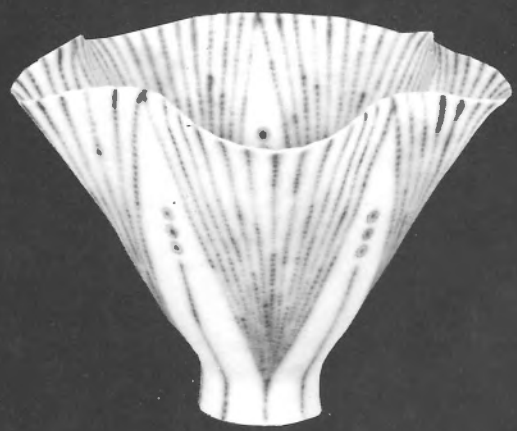
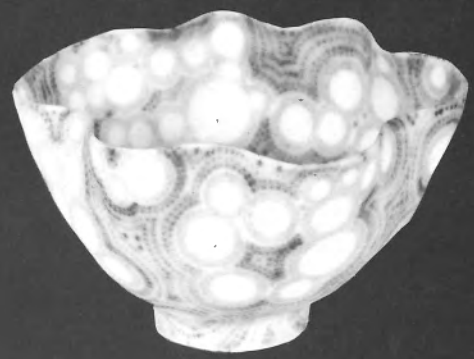

Photo: Mary Rogers

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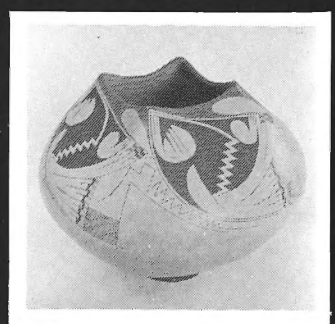

Juan Quezada

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March 10 – April 15

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Tuesday – Saturday: 11–4

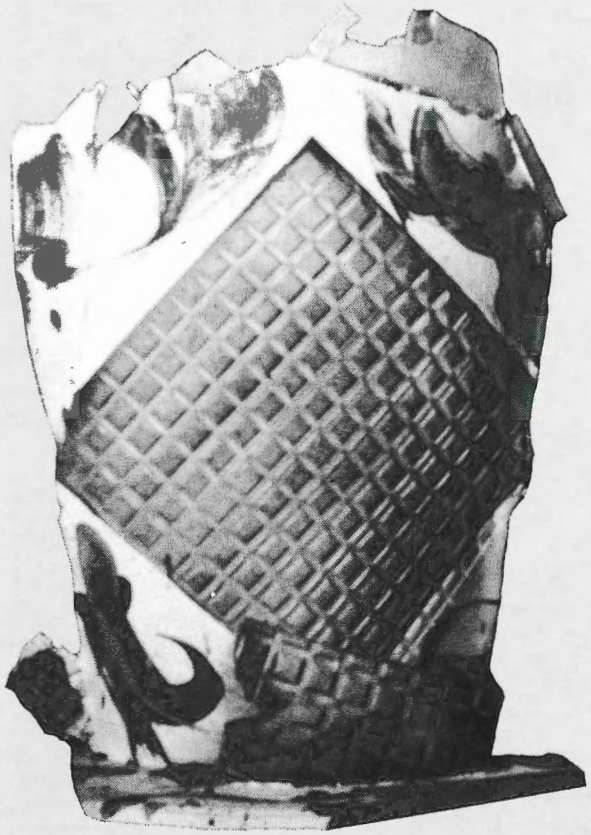

Photo: Window Gate (1984), 42" high, ceramic.

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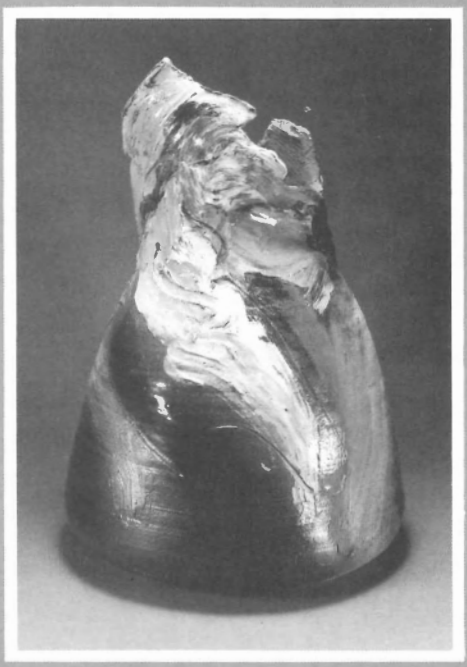

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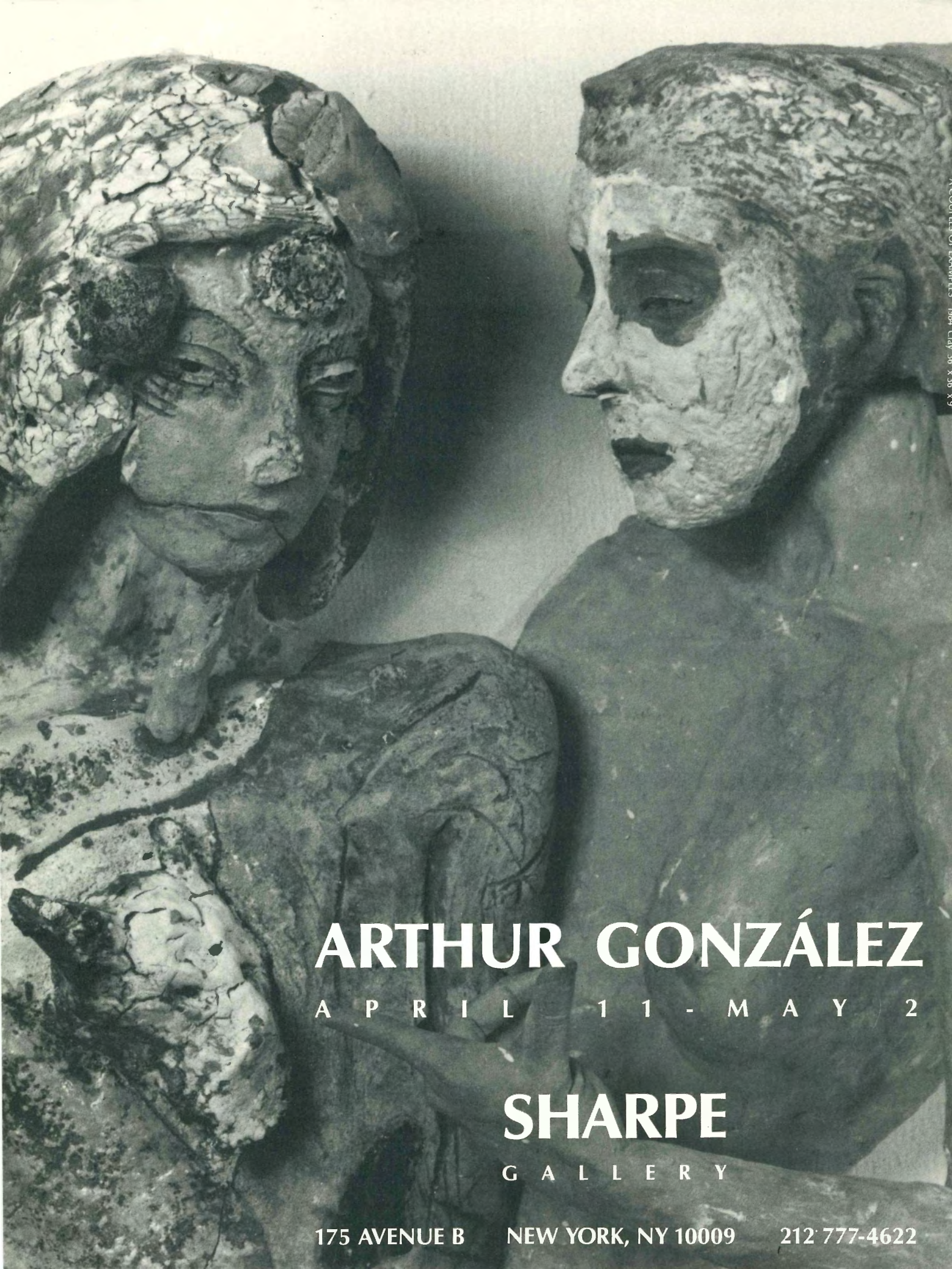
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April

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